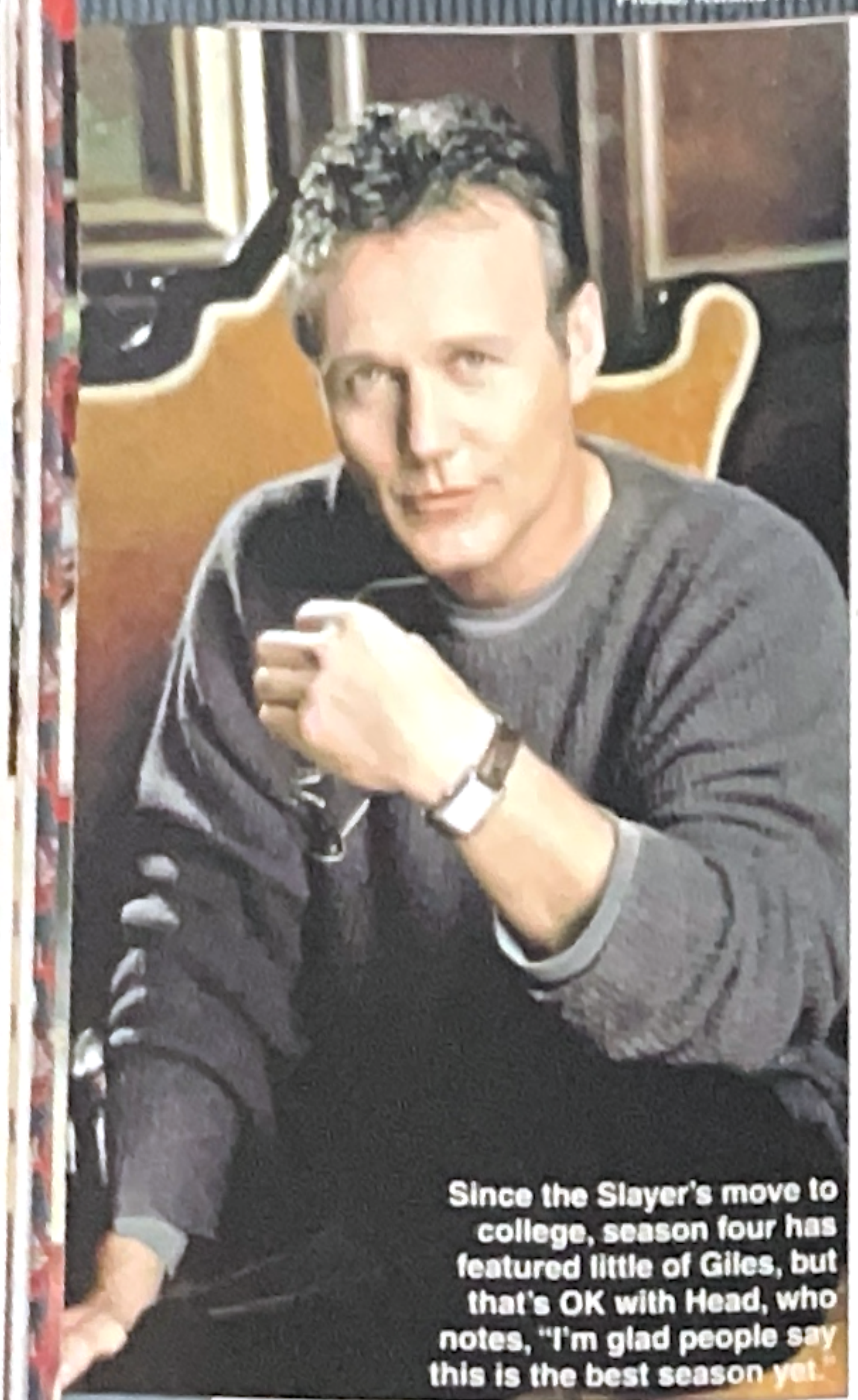
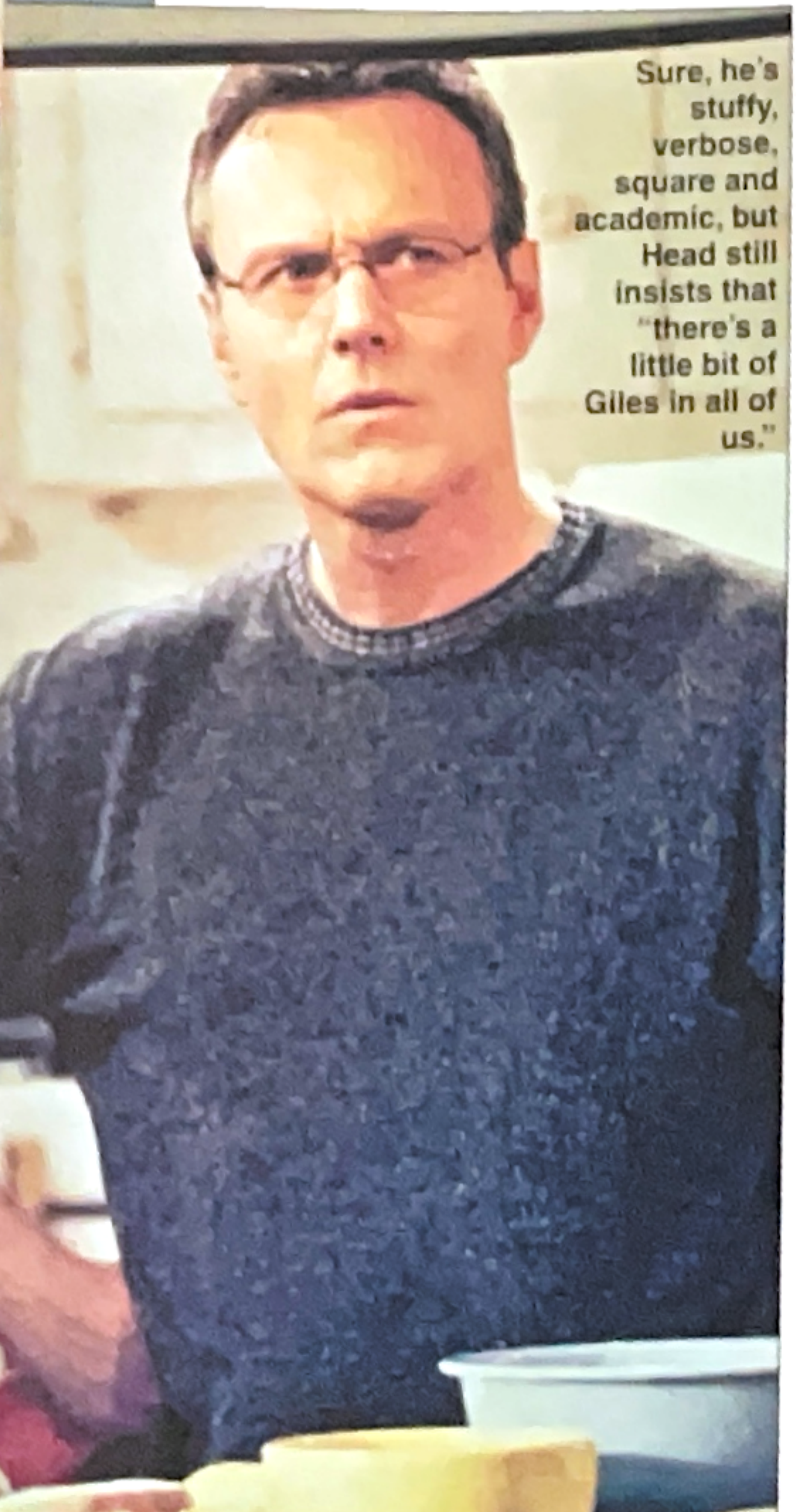
Photo: Kwaku Alston



Since the Slayer's move to college, season four has featured little of Giles, but that's OK with Head, who notes, "I'm glad people say this is the best season yet."



Sure, he's stuffy, verbose, square and academic, but Head still insists that "there's a little bit of Giles in all of us."

time, the clothes I wore had to be from Giles' wardrobe, because he doesn't go out and buy cool looking outfits. His jeans have paint all over them, because he drags out his painting trousers. It was a bit of a conglomeration of teen images, so whether or not it works, I don't know. I don't think Giles had an identity at that point. All he knew was that he didn't want to be part of the establishment that he has been raised to be. Jane writes really well for me, and I like her stuff. She has a wonderfully sick sense of humor, which fits right in there."

Espenson also wrote "A New Man" this past season, which turned out to be one of the major Giles episodes to date. After a night of drinking with his school chum and old nemesis Ethan Rayne (Robin Sachs), Giles wakes up the next morning transformed into a grotesque horned demon. The script was reportedly written in response to Head's desire to wear prosthetic makeup—in this case, he certainly got his wish. "Actually, I would *love* to do more!" he admits. "I hadn't been sitting there saying, 'I want to have a go!' but it is something that was created for me, and it was great fun to be involved.

"When they first told me that I was going to do it, I thought I was going to get to kick some butt. I thought it would be, 'Giles goes ape!' When they told me it was going to be funny, I was still looking for moments when I could be a bit scary. It's such a wonderful allegory for being out of the loop. It's brilliant, a great piece of writing and the whole idea is just great: What does it feel like when *nobody* is listening to you anymore and doesn't understand you anyway?"

"If Joss had had a good time in school, we wouldn't have Buffy."

Watchful Talent

But people are certainly listening to Head at this stage in his career. Born in London to a show business family (his mother is an actress, his father a documentary producer and his brother is the singer Murray Head), he seemed destined for a future in entertainment. He won three consecutive drama competitions in junior high, and soon began writing his own plays, which were performed at the school.

After graduating, Head worked for a year as an assistant editor at his father's production company before being accepted at the London Academy of Music and Dramatic Arts. After graduating in 1976, he eventually landed a role as an understudy in a tour of *Godspell*. When the production was brought to the West End for a limited run, Head starred as Jesus.

The actor's first TV break was a starring role in the World War II drama *Enemy at the Door*. That was followed by another lead in *Love in a Cold Climate*, and appearances in such BBC productions as *Secret Army*, *Bergerac*, *Howard's Way* and *Pulaski*.

It was Head's recurring role in a series of Taster's Choice coffee commercials, however, that made him a household face. His chemistry with actress Sharon Maugham turned out to be so compelling that the ad campaign became an ongoing soap opera of sorts, with a dozen commercials shot for UK TV and another dozen for the American market.

For the past several years, Head has successfully managed to divide his time between stage, TV and film, both in the US and UK. His theater credits include *A Patriot For Me*, *Yonadab* (working opposite Patrick Stewart), *Chess*, *The Heiress*, *Rope* and two different stints in *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, in which he caused a stir as Frank-N-Furter.

Among Head's feature credits are *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, *Devil's Hill*, *A Prayer for the Dying* and *Royce*. His television appearances include *Highlander*, *The Ghostbusters of East Finchley*, *Jonathan Creek* (extra points to *Buffy* watchers who recognize the theme music being played during Giles' presentation in "Hush"), *NYPD Blue* and *Two Guys, a Girl and a Pizza Place*.

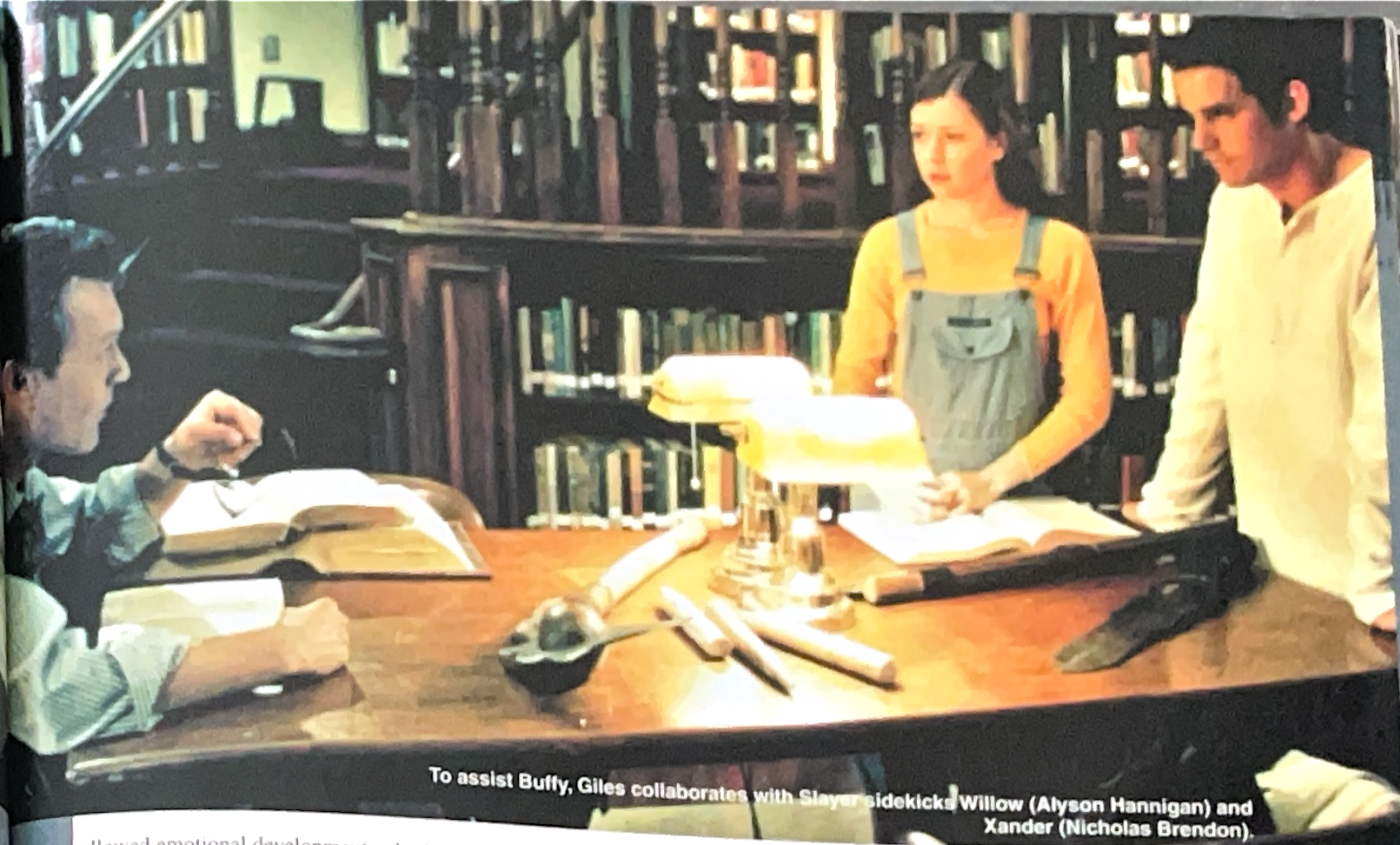
Head's other major genre credit is the short-lived *VR.5*, a series the actor co-starred in with Lori Singer. Though it only lasted a season, it wasn't long before Head was contacted about a quirky new project called *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*.

Five seasons later, the series is an international success, and the straight-laced Giles has continued to evolve as a character. He's no longer the uptight librarian of the early episodes, but the jury is still out on just how cool he actually is. "How cool is anyone?" responds Head. "How cool do we think we are, and in fact, in reality, how do other people perceive us?

"There's a little bit of Giles in all of us, in one way or another. He did have his rebellion in the late '60s-early '70s, and broke away from everything that was Establishment, and then came back and embraced it because he had to. There are many people out there like that. I think he's hipper than he actually realizes he is, because there is an edge to him. It was put into a kind of relief when Wesley turned up, because Wesley represented everything that Giles detested. Suddenly, audiences also started thinking, 'Well, actually Giles isn't that bad, if the alternative is Wesley!' He's quite rounded, but that's one of the great things about the writing.

"I just read something that somebody wrote the other day which was very sweet. They basically said, it's wonderful to see a character who can laugh and cry and is allowed emotional development, who isn't a cardboard cutout. He's not a two-dimensional character, there are so many facets to the characters, and I think that's why *Buffy* is such a success, because it does explore so many facets. Buffy is not a two-dimensional character. She has her anguish and confusions—it's interesting, and at the same time, Joss can make you laugh and make you cry. As I've said before, if Joss had had a good time in school, we wouldn't have *Buffy*. I don't know how hip Giles is. Some of the edge has gone while he has been with Buffy, because Buffy has helped him realize that life isn't necessarily about that sterile belief in the Establishment. I think that's good for people to see."

Photo: Byron Cohen



To assist Buffy, Giles collaborates with Slayer sidekicks Willow (Alyson Hannigan) and Xander (Nicholas Brendon).

Although the series does occupy a large part of Head's time, he still tries to keep working on both sides of the Atlantic. On this trip, for example, he's appearing in an episode of the BBC crime drama *Silent Witness*, playing a less-than-sterling character. "He just doesn't have any boundaries, therefore he becomes a suspect wherever he goes, because these women keep dying."

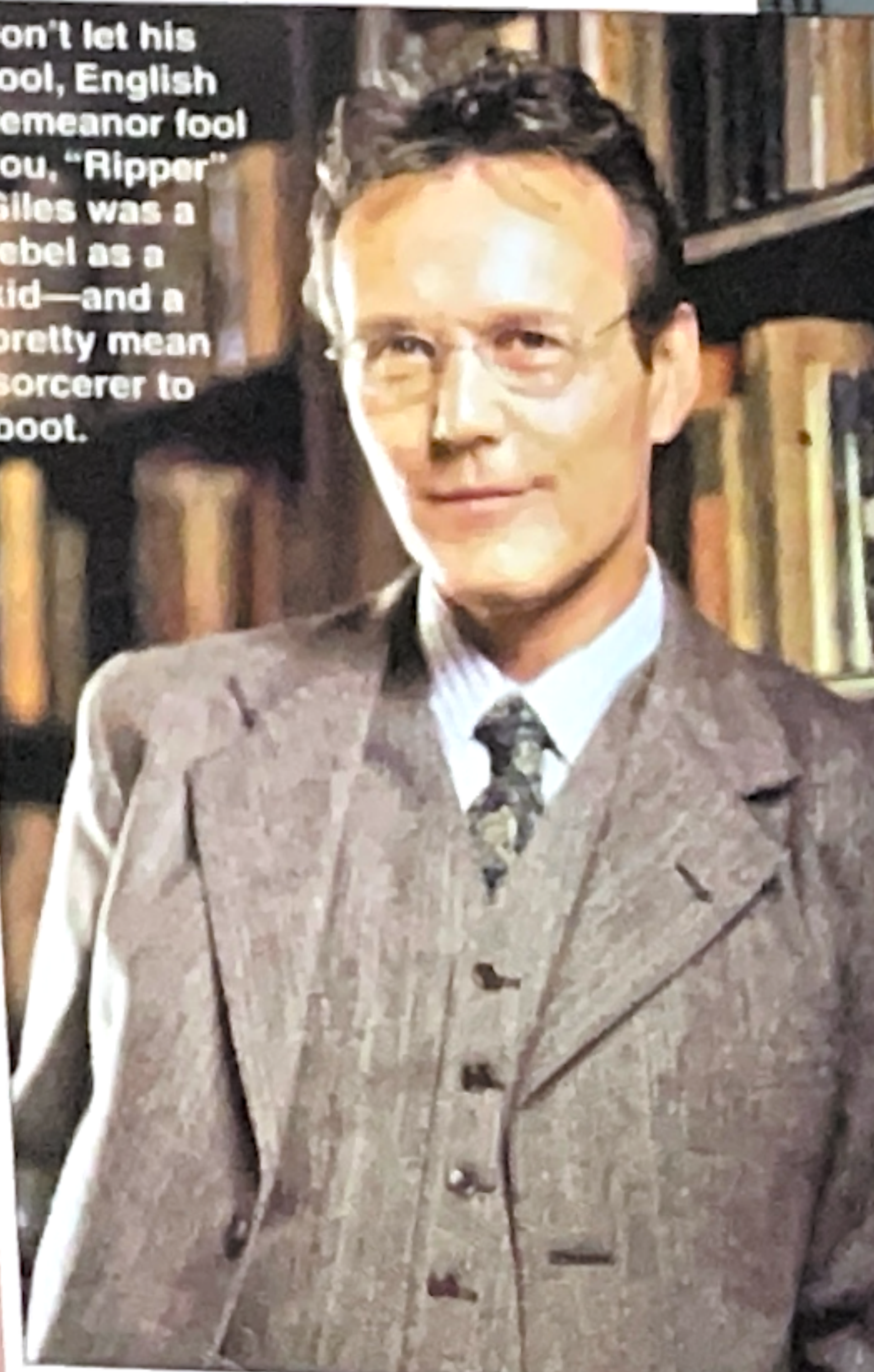
As far as maintaining a presence in England, "I have to say, it has been fantastic. There was a period when I was doing a lot of theater here—I couldn't do TV or film because I had done a commercial which was so successful that it pigeonholed me a bit. My agent said, 'Sorry, love, but we're getting things back from casting directors saying this is a serious drama, we don't want people reaching for their coffee jars,' so I thought, 'Oh great, thanks for the imagination!'

"It was at that point when the commercials went to the States and I thought, 'Well, it's now or never, I have to see if I have a career over there.' It has been quite remarkable going [to the U.S.] and pretty much being able to go from one job to another. I'm fortunate to be doing *Buffy*, because it is truly universal. I'm sure that a lot of the industry here doesn't know what the hell it's about, but the industry in the States love it, and it's nice to be seen doing good work. Where do you get the opportunity to do some serious drama and some really nice comedy, and at the same time, run around in prosthetics? I've had such a great time, so I wasn't thinking, 'I had better keep my oar in over here, because otherwise, they'll think that's all I do.'

"I want very much for [England] to still be my home, which is why I travel back and forth. I want my kids to be brought up here. We've put them in school over there a couple of times and it was fantastic, but this is their home. My girl friend works with animals here, and we have horses and stuff that ties us here. So America's just where I work, and I have an extremely long commute!"

As *Buffy* begins its fifth season, one might think that Anthony Stewart Head may have an idea regarding the future of his character. For now, though, he's just happy to see what the show's creator comes up with. "Joss has given me a general idea of where he's going this season, and I'm fascinated by it. I did pitch one idea to him, which actually clashes with a few things already going on, but it's such an open book with Joss and it's so much fun, I would rather see where he takes it. I do like the dark side of Giles, just because everybody goes, 'Whoa!' whenever we see a bit of it, but I have no doubt that if it's needed, Joss will put it in there. I will kindly defer to what he feels he wants to do to me.

"This is a dream gig. You can say that until you're blue in the face, and no one really knows how you mean it, but not only am I in a high profile show, it's also very hip to be in it, and it's really well-written. It's very funny, very scary at times and very tongue-in-cheek. At the same time, I have a really good relationship with the writer, who has a complete concept about what he's doing and it doesn't stay static, ever!" ☆



Don't let his cool, English demeanor fool you, "Ripper" Giles was a rebel as a kid—and a pretty mean sorcerer to boot.

All Sheena Photos: Copyright 2000 Columbia TriStar Television

THE JUNGLE QUEEN

By KIM HOWARD JOHNSON

Gena Lee Nolin swings into eco-adventure as Sheena.

There's a new Queen in the Jungle. As cameras roll, former *Baywatch* star Gena Lee Nolin has picked up the mantle of *Sheena* in this fall's weekly syndicated series that hopes to re-invent comics' wildlife liberator for the New Millennium. Today's Sheena is an animal rights advocate—a defender of the jungle's creatures with new, superheroic abilities that help her carry out her missions.

"She is able to morph," Nolin says. "She can morph into other animals, which is a really fun thing for the kids and one of the most popular ideas. That's what's so fun, what brings the comic book aspect back—that Spider-Man thing where he can cast a web and save people. It's the same thing with Sheena. She has these abilities to morph into any [animal or] mammal out there."

Special FX facilitate Sheena's morphing throughout the series. "It's amazing," says Nolin. "They took casts of my face so they could add certain things. We have an episode where I morph into a dolphin, and I'm actually swimming with dolphins. I'm protecting the sea from an oil rig about to explode, and I save all these dolphins."

The actress is just as excited about upcoming adventures, which contrast Sheena's innocence with today's civilization. "I am *not* used to civilization," she describes one episode. "I have to wear this sexy dress and heels—I mean, what the hell are heels?! And with a bra! I just usually go around naked when I feel like it. It's a sexy show. It's going to be a little innocent because Sheena is very vulnerable, but she still has this sexual tension with the lead guy. She's also morphing constantly. She's in dangerous situations and kicking butt, both women's and men's—so I'm excited! The scripts are brilliantly written, and we have a group of people here who are outstanding. The *Baywatch* days are over!"

Despite her remark, it was Nolin's association *with Baywatch* that ultimately led her to don Sheena's loincloth. "The executive producer of *Baywatch* and I remained on very good terms [after I left]," says Nolin. "I worked one season after my son was born, and decided that I was all done with it. A year later, he called and said he had looked at half of Hollywood, and I was the only one who could do this role! I met with Columbia [Pictures TV, the show's syndicator] and decided to do it. Before then, I did a lot of research on it as far as who the character was and working with the animals in the jungle—it was something that appealed to me."

Nolin notes *Sheena* has been a long time in development. "I did the pilot almost two years ago—now, actually starting up the series seems wild, because we *never* thought it was going to happen. Columbia looked it over with a fine-tooth comb, and here we are, doing 22 episodes. We just had to shop it around and make sure people were *really* interested in *Sheena*. We were sold in 98 percent of the world, which makes us one of the highest bought pre-sold shows. We were overwhelmed at how well-received it was."

Femmes Feral

Created by Jerry Iger and Will Eisner in 1938 for *Jumbo Comics* #1, the first publication from Fiction House, Sheena enjoyed a successful comic book career that eventually sparked the fondly-remembered 1950s *Sheena* TV series. Nolin credits that show with giving the character so much more appeal. "She was a strong character," Nolin says. "I spoke to Irish McCalla, the original Sheena, and it was absolutely inspiring. She's such a strong woman. That enticed me. We need more people like her out there."

Though Nolin has not yet seen any of the original black-and-white TV shows, McCalla did help her in other ways. "Irish did give me all of her journals—what it was like working back in 1952—and it was very interesting," the young actress says. "She's very inspiring. She was very sick with brain cancer, but I did have an opportunity to share some great things with her."

To Nolin, meeting with McCalla was like passing the torch. "She really gave me some great advice. She said most of all, 'Be careful not to get stereotyped in this role.' It was very hard for her in the '50s to go on to other things because of the role," Nolin explains, "and I really took that to heart. I'm passionate about this project, but I realize that when it's over—and I'm hoping for a long run—that I go on to other things, because I enjoy being an actress. I enjoy portraying different characters."

An unsuccessful big-screen attempt to revive the character starred *Charlie's Angels'* Tanya Roberts, but that 1984 Columbia Pictures film has little to do with the new version. "That was then, this is now," Nolin maintains. "I don't want *any* comparisons to that movie. Columbia just has it together, and they're willing to do anything to make this thing amazing! Everything is taken into consideration—the writing and a great group of the most wonderful, down-to-Earth people—that's what makes a success."

Nolin trained extensively prior to the show's summer lensing start. "We're shooting in Orlando, part-time at Disney, and Busch Gardens as well for jungle sequences," she says. "We're working with a lot of animals. One of the show's characters will be Bella, my little chimpanzee. She's just a doll. I've had to train with them many times, and it's just a blast. They are so incredibly smart that it's scary.

Is that a horn on your head or are you just happy to see Sheena? But seriously, Nolin finds working with her beastly co-stars a thrill.

"I've been doing a great deal of training with the animals and for the fight sequences, so I have the right idea as far as my character. I'm training for *everything*, because on *Baywatch*, running down the beach was the extent of it!

"I have a ton of fight sequences over the course of 22 weeks. In almost every episode, I'm doing four or five different things, because I'm protecting the jungle. In the midst of that is the good vs. evil [aspect], with good hopefully winning. In order to do that, I've got to kick some butt!"

The actress explains that the character has little in common with her real-life self. "I'm so laidback and funny, and have a sense of humor about life in general. But this character is the opposite. She's naive in many ways, very vulnerable, and yet savage. Sheena has been raised in the jungle, and so she really fights and acts like an animal."

While Nolin's wildlife defender represents a sort-of modern woman, the actress was inspired by the strength of TV's original Sheena, Irish McCalla (not pictured).

Photo: Anthony Neste

Sheena not only cavorts with the animals, thanks to morphing special FX, she can also become them.

Creature Comforts

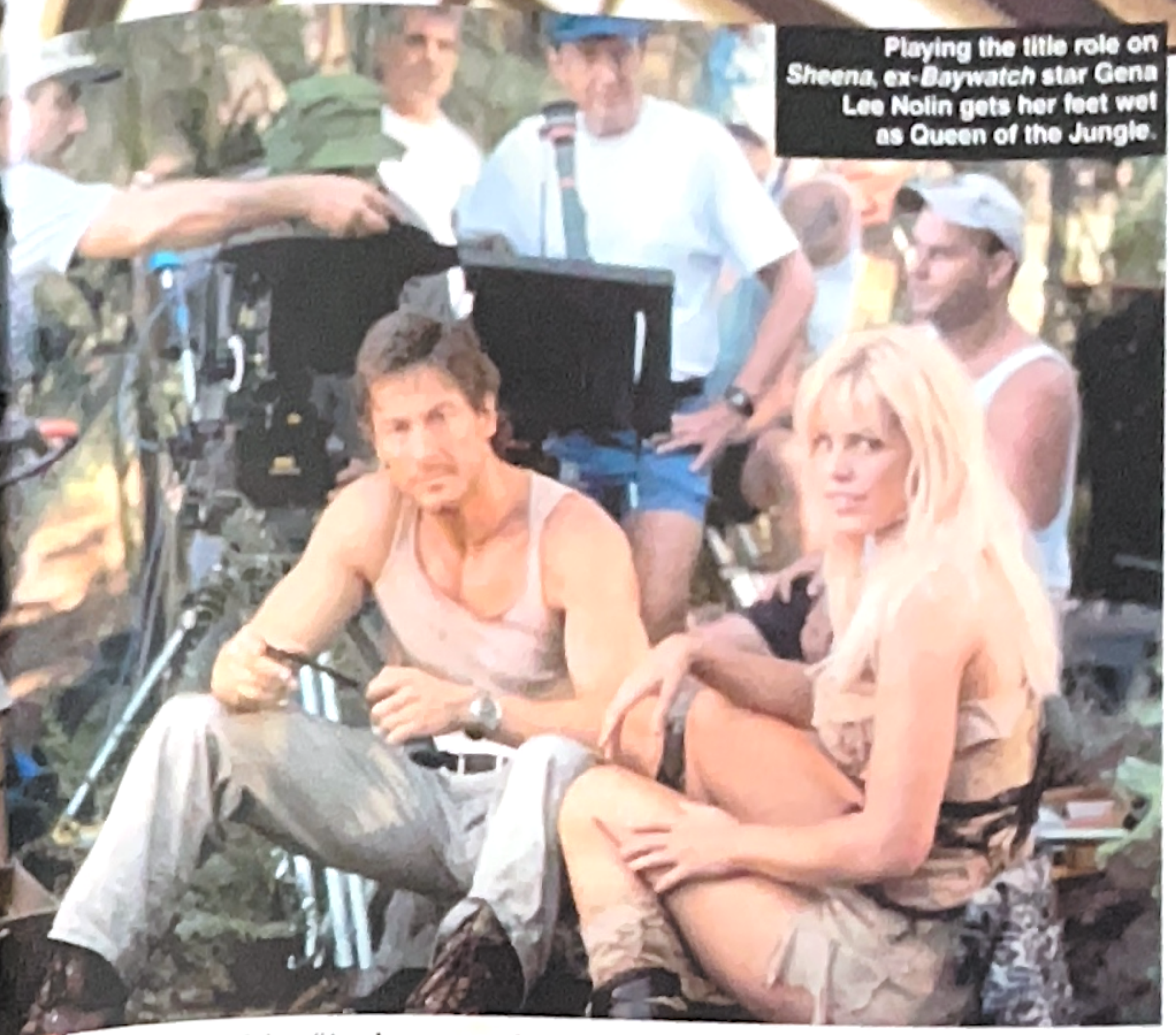
Even though the two Nolin series are quite different, *Baywatch* nevertheless helped prepare the actress for *Sheena*. "*Baywatch* was such a great learning experience, a place where you could grow as an actor. It certainly wasn't a Robert De Niro production!" she laughs. "You had room to move, and that helped getting on to any other acting job. The physicality of *Baywatch* was definitely a bonus for me going into this role, because obviously, Sheena is not a weakling who files her nails. I'm kicking some butt and having a blast doing it! We've done a few days where I was working with elephants and giraffes—the most incredible things! We were cheek-to-cheek; I was petting them. It's a powerful role that I'm taking on."

The actress was delighted, in fact, to find herself thrown into scenes with a variety of exotic animals. "It's so amazing," she says.

"We're taking care of animals—we're definitely an environmental show. In the last few days, working with zebras and rhinos, I've just realized how beautiful the wild animals truly are. I was right there with them! It was like, 'OK, you're my scene partner!' We had some magic moments. It was a beautiful thing. I've never been that close to nature before."

Many actors are reluctant to work with animals, but Nolin revels in it. "Animals remind me of children," she explains. "They watch us, and there's this vulnerable outlook on what we're doing. Of course, we can only do so much. If the animals act like, 'This is not what we want to do today,' then we simply do not do it. They're very vulnerable and innocent. And they don't talk back! They have absolutely no ego! It's lovely to work with animals."

Nolin claims *not* to be afraid of acting with animals, but that doesn't mean she isn't cautious. "You're on their turf, you're in their world when you're working with them," she explains. "As close as my character Sheena is, that is her family. These animals are my siblings. So to have that closeness with them and to be actually be that cavalier and comfortable is dangerous! You must make sure there are trainers around who know these animals' moods, and what they're willing to handle. As cute as a little bear cub is, you can't just go over, pick it up and start playing. You have to use caution. I have such enormous respect for these animals that I feel honored to work with them."



Playing the title role on *Sheena*, ex-*Baywatch* star Gena Lee Nolin gets her feet wet as Queen of the Jungle.

Photo: Anthony Neste

Though production has only begun, Nolin already has a favorite animal. "I love the elephants," she says. "I was sitting there for an hour-and-a-half yesterday, in their area where they live, on rocks, feeding them apples while the cameras are rolling 200 feet away. Pretty cool! At first, I was freaking out, there's no way in Timbuktu that I'm going to do this—these elephants are going to come after me and charge me out of here. But they loved me! And I loved them. We didn't want to leave each other. By the end, I was saying, 'Come here, little pumpkin, little baby, come over here, Rosie!' She came over, took her trunk and she was sniffing my hair. She loved my hair, she was twirling it up into a ball and started pulling, and the trainer was laughing. I was two feet away from her feet."

Wild Women

Upcoming *Sheena* episodes will allow Nolin to explore other areas of the animal kingdom. "The dolphin show is a two-parter," she explains. "There are terrorists who want to set off a huge oil explosion that would basically wipe out all sea life. I'm going head-to-head with these people, morphing and working with dolphins.

"The episode in which I'm changing roles, I have to go into this presidential dinner. I'm wearing a dress and learning to walk in heels. When I morph, the only way I can morph back wearing clothing is by wearing the skins of an animal—if I wear synthetics, a dress or whatever, when I morph back, I'm naked! So I'm at this party, and after I morph back, I'm stark naked!"

It's difficult to determine whether this program's primary audience will be Sheena-envious girls or Sheena-covetous boys. "It's a funny thing," says Nolin. "When we would get the statistics back on *Baywatch*, more women under 30 watched the series than men. This show caters to *all* ages. Kids will be watching because of the great FX, girls and teenage boys will check it out. Women like to check out women in many ways, and that's really my point about the *Baywatch* statistics. Of course, men are lured to our show by the sexy girls."

And there will certainly be many other lovely ladies dropping by Sheena's jungle. "We have a supermodel episode coming up," Nolin reports. "Iman, the African supermodel, has agreed to do our show. We're trying to get Naomi Campbell and possibly Beverly Johnson. These are stunningly beautiful African-Americans who are obviously very influential in the African community, and that is what our show is about. We are open to all races—we are the world, baby!"

Series writer-producer Steven Sears (COMICS SCENE 2000 #2) believes part of Sheena's appeal is that the character is "Tarzan with breasts." Nolin thinks there's more to the character's six-decade-long-popularity than just that. "She has come and gone," the actress explains. "She was out in the '30s, back in the '50s, back again in the early '80s and now she's back in 2000. It's a very special year for us. Times are changing, things are turning around. People are highly into comic books—I'm reading them and doing my research, and my son loves them. Certainly *Sheena* appeals to many people, and people want to see something different now. And this is definitely different!"

Nolin admits to growing up a comics fan and even identified with superheroines past. "I loved Wonder Woman and She-Ra [of Masters of the Universe]! She was a babe! She was strong, wonderful and all the little girls wanted to be her."

If the new *Sheena* series is successful, the actress will be more than happy to reign as Queen of the Jungle for years to come. "I am *so* ready!" Gena Lee Nolin says. "I'm giving 150-percent of myself. If it goes, I'm ready, and if it doesn't, then I'm just glad I could be Queen for a year." ✡

Nolin asserts that Sheena "is a sexy show," but adds that her "s-veldt" siren's simple living will help keep the series "a little innocent."

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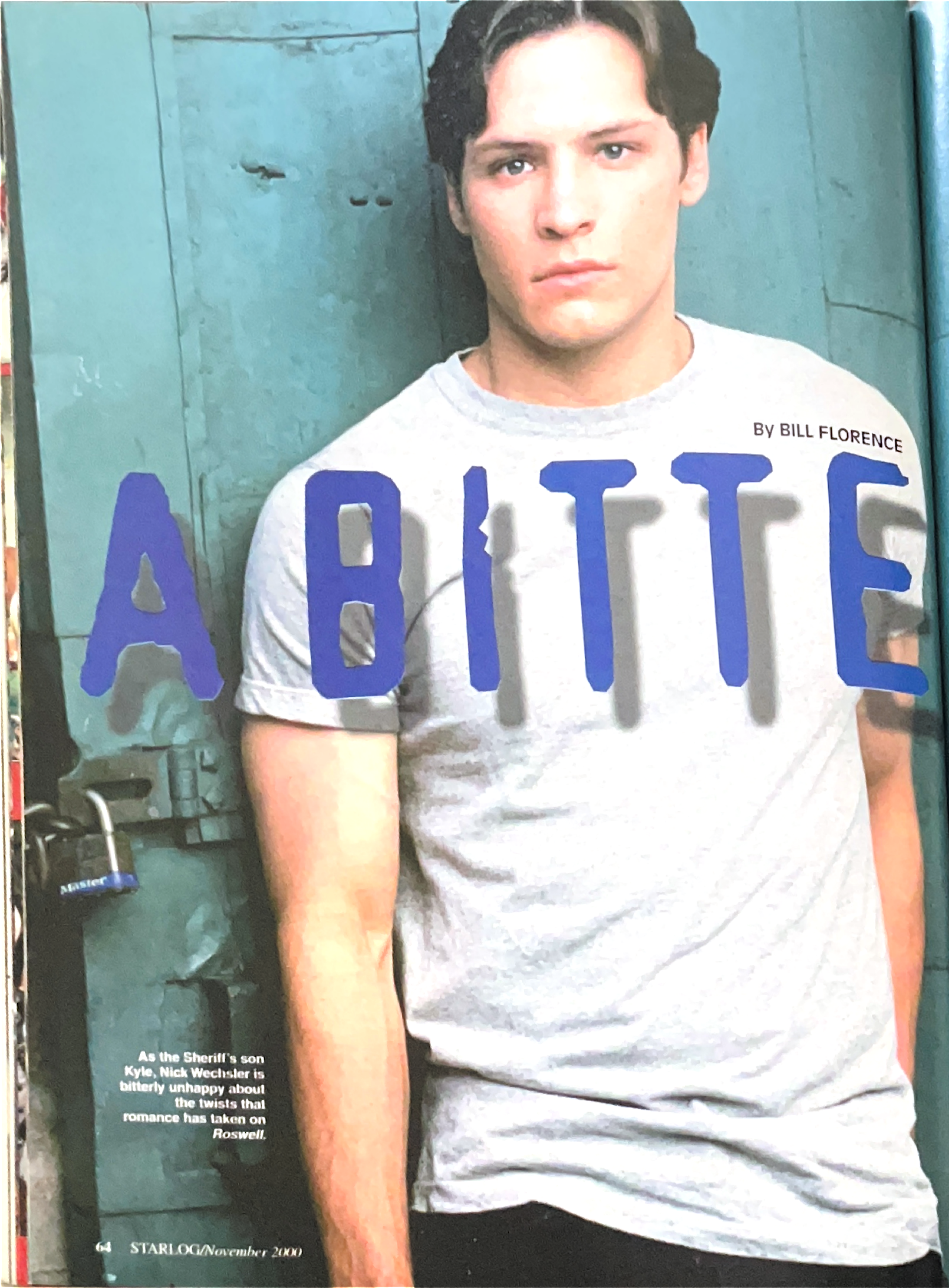


As the Sheriff's son Kyle, Nick Wechsler is bitterly unhappy about the twists that romance has taken on *Roswell.*

A BITTER YOUTH

Nick Wechsler looks forward to the day Kyle Valenti stops being a jerk.

By BILL FLORENCE

Nick Wechsler is unaccustomed to being interviewed. The 22-year-old co-star of *Roswell* fears sounding pretentious as he answers questions about playing Liz's jilted former boy friend, Kyle Valenti. There are questions he has never considered before, questions that make him uncomfortable and questions that evoke an almost painful honesty.

For instance, Wechsler admits he is a little weary of playing a heel. "Kyle's a jerk, and he doesn't get over things," says the actor, who has just arrived home after a long day on the *Roswell* set. "He went from being jealous and bothered in the beginning of the series, to getting more jealous and bothered as things continued to *not* go his way. So, he made life more and more difficult for the people around him. Characters who are just one color, who don't go through changes, aren't realistic. That's why I *don't* like having Kyle be the jerk all the time. I look forward to *any* opportunity to do something else with the part."

Frustrations aside, Wechsler is thrilled to be working on *Roswell*, just entering its second season on the WB. And he's happy to report that some changes are in store for Kyle this year. After all, last season's final episode, "Destiny," saw a mortally wounded Kyle healed by Max (Jason Behr) as Kyle's father, Sheriff Valenti (William Sadler), looked on. "I can't talk about it too much," says Wechsler, "except to say that there's an interesting arc [underway], and I find it more interesting [than my role last year] because I don't want to do the same thing the whole time. There are some changes that Kyle goes through this season that are fun to play around with. I'm happy that they're affording me those opportunities, and I'm looking forward to being kind of nice now and then. I would like variety—the chance to play some funny stuff and some dramatic stuff."

Kyle's relationship with Liz (Shiri Appleby), for instance, might be entering a new phase. "Last year, they were pretty far apart. Kyle wouldn't really talk to Liz, and when he did, he was rude. But this season, there's a possibility for him to *not* hate her," Wechsler reveals. "We've only shot four episodes so far, and it's not like the two characters have become best friends or anything. It's just that there isn't so much tension between them anymore. It hasn't been completely addressed yet in any of these episodes, but it's apparent that when Max saved him, Kyle understood why Liz had been acting so weird."

What's more, Wechsler hints that a bit of a romance could be in store for the bitter teen. "There are some chances for it, but Kyle is not central to the plot, so don't look for something like that to be the focus," he cautions. "I can say that Kyle is put in some situations in the coming episodes where romance *is* a possibility."

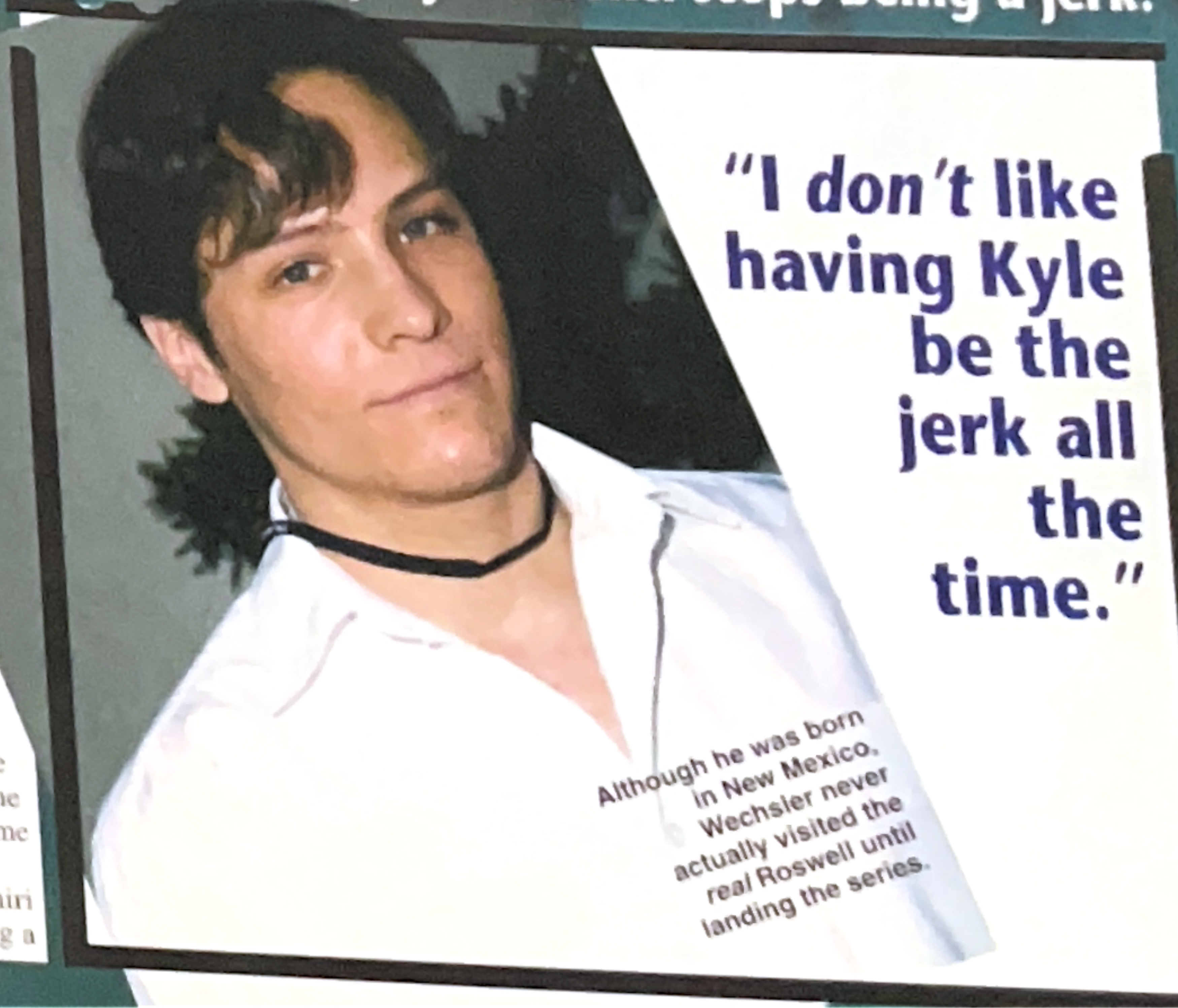
That, too, would be a welcome addition, right? "Yes, but I would be really nervous having any make-out scenes," he notes shyly. "Imagine, you don't know the person that well and you're supposed to kiss her and all this..." His voice trails off with genuine consternation.

The Sheriff's Son

Roswell obviously has picked up a loyal audience, as the 13-episode renewal for a second season attests. But Wechsler's own report card on *Roswell* remains blank because, as an insider, he feels he has no perspective. "Our show isn't even real to me because I'm involved," he reflects. "It's hard for me to judge *Roswell* for that reason. I can't say the show is fantastic, only that I enjoy working on it. But I don't buy it as a viewer, because as I watch, I know how many takes we did to get the scenes to work. I know everything that went into making it, because I was there. It's a shame, really. I know where the story's going, so I can't be surprised or affected by it. It's *all* fake to me."

That sense of unreality also makes it difficult for the actor to pick a favorite episode. "In terms of acting, I had the most

"I don't like having Kyle be the jerk all the time."



Although he was born in New Mexico, Wechsler never actually visited the *real* Roswell until landing the series.

Photo: Copyright 2000 20th Century Fox Television

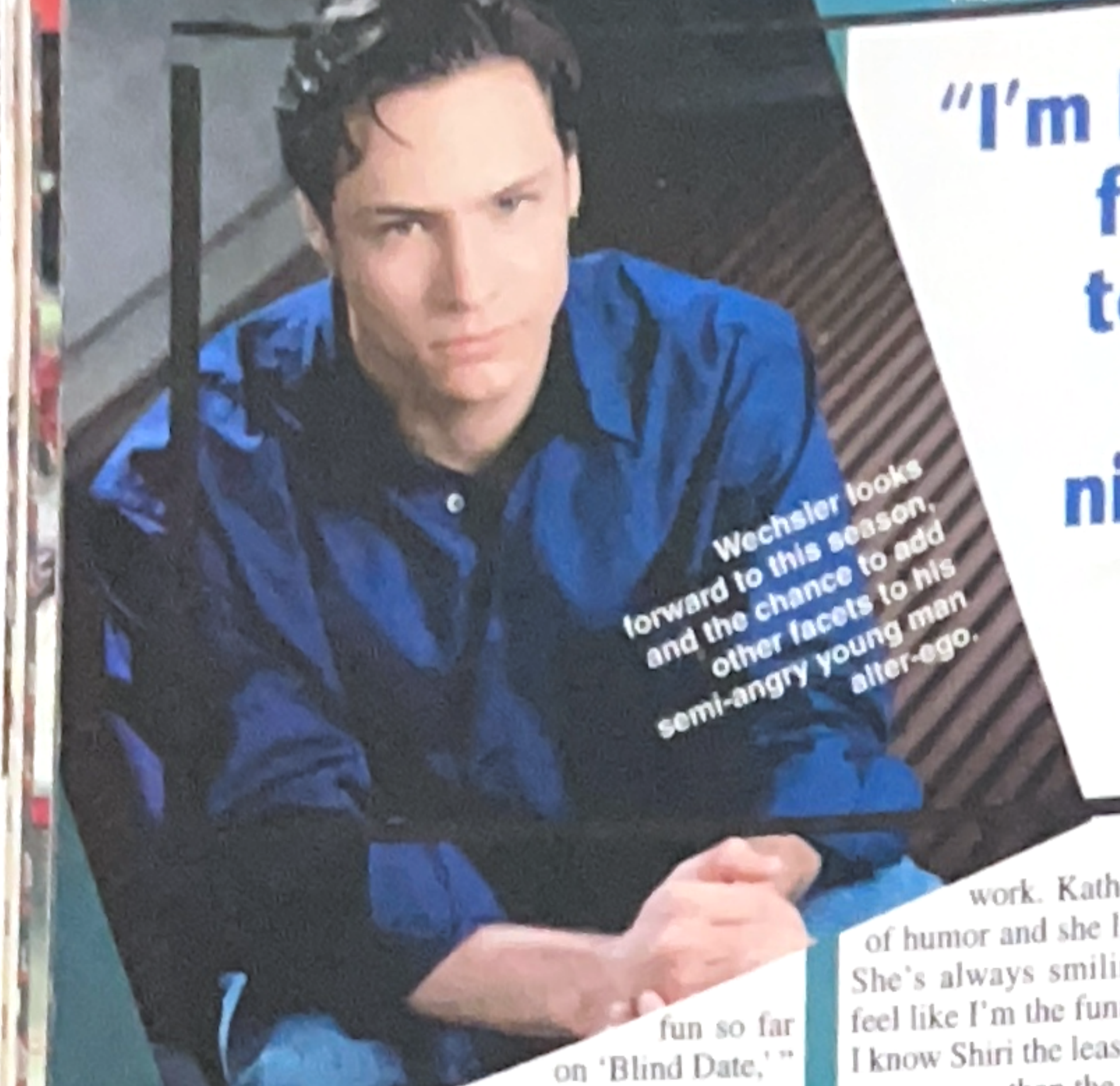


Photo: James Sorensen/Copyright 1999 The WB

Wechsler looks forward to this season, and the chance to add other facets to his semi-angry young man alter-ego.

"I'm looking forward to being kind of nice now and then."

fun so far on 'Blind Date,'" he says. "You can call that one the drunk episode. It was a little more of a stretch for me. Kyle got drunk in that one, and I had fun attempting to not overplay it."

Wechsler confirms that this year, *Roswell* will be more action- and science fiction-oriented. "I guess the network might have felt the love stories were slowing things down," he surmises. "There are plenty of shows out there with love stories, but what separates ours from those is the SF and the chance for action. We can cover different territory by the very nature of our subject matter. So the network wants us to explore that more."

Along for the exploration are Sadler, Appleby, Behr, Katherine Heigl as Isabel, Brendan Fehr as Michael, Majandra Delfino as Maria, Colin Hanks as Alex and Emilie deRavin as Tess. Wechsler thinks the world of Sadler, the lone adult in the regular cast. "He's funny and talented and just amazing," Wechsler says of the veteran actor who portrays his father. "He's really cool and I hang out with him a bit. He's sure of himself and his talent. He knows he's capable, he has nothing to prove and he has no ego. It's great watching him work, because you can tell he's a professional. He's not in this to be famous, whereas many people on teen shows are. They go to all the Hollywood parties, play it up, spend all their money and bitch about everything. That's *not* Bill Sadler at all.

"As for the others, I don't really know them," Wechsler admits. "I talk to them on the set, but that's usually the extent of it. I know Brendan a little; we've spoken a few times outside of work. Katherine has a good sense of humor and she laughs a lot; I love that. She's always smiling and she makes me feel like I'm the funniest guy on the planet. I know Shiri the least of all; she seems to be alone more than the rest of us."

Although he's on a show aimed primarily at teenagers, Wechsler loathes the spate of teen shows infesting television. "I hadn't really watched many of them before *Roswell*," he says. "I don't care for them at all, and I want the whole wave to end. But I like having a job, and I love working with the producers and writers on *Roswell*. I'm extremely fortunate to have this job."

But Wechsler is not ready to divulge his thoughts on *who* Kyle is, other than the obvious. He prefers to stick with what viewers have seen on the screen. "I feel pretentious explaining anything else beyond the obvious things—he was Liz's boy friend, and he's the Sheriff's son. Anything else is just stuff that I create or pretend I'm putting into the part," he says. "I hate listening to actors [invent their characters' attributes]. It's like they're kissing their own asses about the stuff they added."

What he will say is that he is seldom pleased with his own performance on the show. Wechsler is, quite simply, his own worst critic. "I always end up not being happy with the way I'm doing the character," he says. "I never hate myself so often as I do when I'm acting. I feel stupid complaining about it, though. It's easier just to think nothing. But at the same time, I want people to understand that if ever they hate my performance, believe me, I hear you! I felt that way first, so don't think I don't realize it."

New Mexico Boy

Appropriately enough, Wechsler was born and raised in New Mexico—but in Albuquerque, *not* Roswell. He never visited the town famous for the alleged 1947 UFO crash—not until he was living in LA and landed a part on *Roswell*. "I went there fairly recently to check it out, and it was interesting," he laughs. "That's all I'm saying."

He's unsure what to think about the UFO phenomenon. While he has never seen a flying saucer, Wechsler points out that technically, he has seen a UFO. "One time I saw something that looked like it was flying, and I couldn't *identify* it, so that makes it a UFO, doesn't it? But it could have been something on my contacts. Or I might have been drinking," he quips. "Of course, I was in middle school at the time, and I wasn't a heavy drinker then, so who knows?

"But there *must* be something to it all," he adds, waxing serious. "It would be hard to believe there is nothing to all the talk, and that intrigues me."

Candidly, the actor admits he's not much of an SF fan, although he "loved *Event Horizon*. But I don't think in genres. I don't like to categorize anything. I liked *The Matrix*, and my favorite TV show is *The X-Files*, but not because of its genre. I like *The X-Files* more than any show, including ours."

Wechsler's résumé includes a role on the 1997 TV series *Team Knight Rider*. Reminded of that fact, he half-chuckles, half-groans. "I knew that was coming! Honestly, what I remember most about *Team Knight Rider* is the people I worked with. Anyone who has seen it knows it wasn't the greatest show, but some people liked it. I had fun. It was a good experience. Whether it turned out well or not is a different story."

Some day, *Roswell* will end. That's when Wechsler hopes to land roles in feature films. "Everyone says that, but that's what I've hoped for all along," he notes wryly.

For now, he would be happy just getting more to do on *Roswell*. "I like to do it. It's fun to pretend, and I look forward to doing it every day—even if I'm not happy at the *end* of the day," says Nick Wechsler. "I just say to myself, 'Damn it, I'll get it tomorrow,' and that's kind of exciting." ☆

As the teen techno-wizard Trek, Wechsler (far left) was part of *Team Knight Rider* alongside Kathy Trageser, Duane Davis, Brixton Karnes and Christine Steel.

Photo: Jim Cornfield/Copyright 1997 Universal Television Enterprises

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New executive producer Thomas Ropelewski sends Alan Scarfe, Don Franklin, Jonathan LaPaglia, Justina Vail and Nick Searcy into timely action every *Seven Days.*

Re-Creating History

It's another year of misadventures. Make time for **Seven Days.**

By BILL FLORENCE

Seven Days sends chrononaut Frank Parker back in time weekly to change history. Now the SF-adventure series takes a bold step forward into a third season with some changes of its own.

Most significantly, Chris Crowe, creator of *Seven Days* and its executive producer for the past two seasons is now only a consultant on the series. Stepping up to run the show on a day-to-day basis is Thomas Ropelewski, who began the first season as supervising producer and was co-executive producer last year.

Ropelewski downplays his new executive producer status, insisting he will maintain the course established by Crowe. "I won't do anything different," he says. "We'll continue to be experimental and push the *Seven Days* envelope. I was the head writer for both of the previous years, and I will continue to be that. I've written feature films [including *Look Who's Talking Now* and *The Next Best Thing*] and I've written other television, but I have never been involved in anything quite like this show. It's hard, and that jazzes me."

As for Crowe, he adds, "I'm not exactly sure what his title will be, but he's moving on to develop new things. Chris is playing more of a godfather role on *Seven Days* now."

Timely Changes

Additional developments belie the "business as usual" tone of Ropelewski's remarks. Foremost among them is the addition of a new character to the regular cast: Andrew "Hooter" Owsley, a young computer hacker played by Kevin Christy. He will make his debut in the new season's fifth episode. "We just felt like it was time to bring in a new voice," explains Ropelewski, "someone who would come in and look at the operation with fresh eyes. No one is leaving. Owsley just adds another flavor to the group. We find him in prison awaiting sentencing for cyber crimes that the Justice Department hasn't even figured out punishments for yet. He's given the opportunity to put his brilliant mind to work on the Backstep Project rather than spend 50 years in maximum security. He's an off-the-wall, enthusiastic guy who looks at Backstep as the greatest toy box a boy could ever have. Of course, Parker [Jonathan LaPaglia] loves him—and everyone else is a little nervous about him."

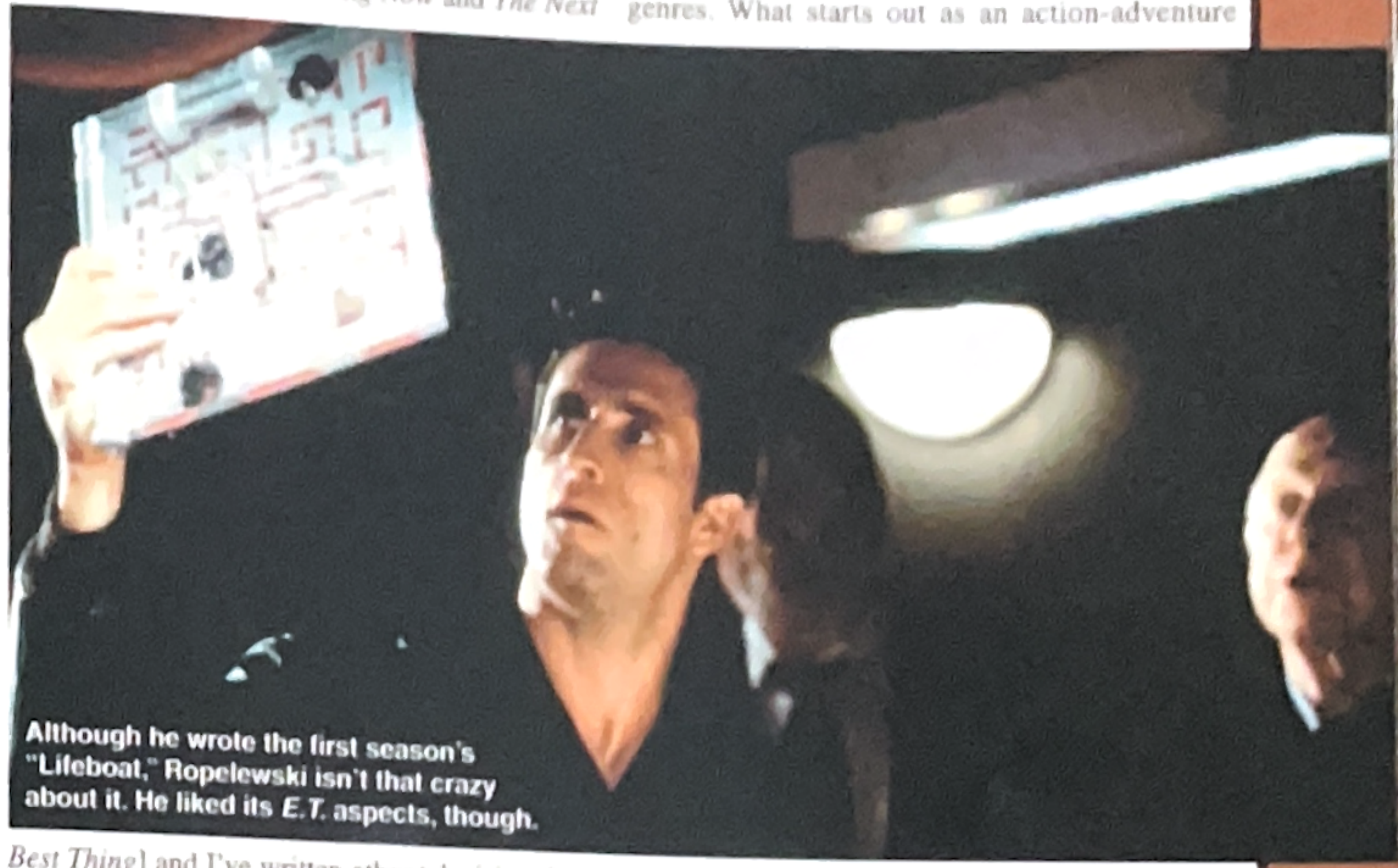
Mentnor (Norman Lloyd) and Ballard (Sam Whipple) will now be recurring characters instead of regulars.

To explain where *Seven Days* is headed in season three, Ropelewski looks back at the show's evolution. "In general, our first season was a more straight-ahead, action-adventure-SF show. We learned quickly and early on that we couldn't blow up the White House every week. The audience wasn't interested in that, and neither were we. This was not just a blow-'em-up, punch-'em-out kind of show. Our audience was more interested in ideas.

"Toward the end of the first season and into the second, we began to have more fun with the premise and explore more genres," he continues. "We began to play with the notion that when we go back in time and replay timelines, we can switch genres. What starts out as an action-adventure episode can become a black comedy, or what begins as romance can become horror. The tone changes, and in essence the actual genre changes. Our audience seems to be digging that. They used to say that one reason people liked network TV was its *sameness*—people felt comfortable with a show and liked to see the same things week in and week out. With our audience, yes, they're comfortable with our characters, but what excites them is the unknown element—they don't know what they're going to get from week to week. It's nice to keep the audience guessing."

Ropelewski's plan, therefore, is to keep mixing it up. "Now that we're comfortable with our characters and the strength of our cast, the show will be a little more comedic, a little lighter, a little sexier," he offers. "With any successful show, the viewers ultimately become invested in the characters. We're going to dig more into *who* these characters are and what roles they'll play in each story. It will be more fun. We'll continue to amp up the sexual sparks between Parker and Olga Vukavitch, for example. Jonathan and Justina Vail have great chemistry together."

Ironically, Vail has said she doesn't exactly see eye-to-eye with LaPaglia on the set (STARLOG #274). "Well, they are very different people,"



Although he wrote the first season's "Lifeboat," Ropelewski isn't that crazy about it. He liked its *E.T.* aspects, though.

Photo: Ron Tom

Photo: Greg Corp

"The Time Gremlin," a second season yarn scripted by Ropelewski, paid tribute to *Twilight Zone*'s "Nightmare at 20,000 Feet."

Photo: Eike Schroter

Ropelewski enjoyed the topicality of "The Cuban Missile," but doesn't buy the Vancouver version of Las Vegas.

Photo: Greg Corp

"Walkaway" gave Ballard (Sam Whipple) the chance to get out of his wheelchair—for truly poignant dramatic impact.

All Photos: Copyright 1999, 2000 Paramount Pictures

the producer says of his two leads. "But you put them in a room together, and give them dialogue where they're sparring intellectually and sexually, and it's gold. We're thrilled with it. It doesn't matter what happens when the camera stops. And it's not like we have a contentious set, not at all. There's just something between Jonathan and Justina, and that's the magic of casting. So we'll show more of the romance and romantic comedy between them. Parker will continue to be frustrated. He and Olga are *not* going to get married, they're not going to become boy friend and girl friend. The fun is in the chase. We will continue to engage in pretty outrageous storytelling."

Historic Episodes

One of last season's most outrageous episodes is one that Ropelewski wrote himself: "The Time Gremlin." "That one started out as a homage to the classic *Twilight Zone* episode 'Nightmare at 20,000 Feet.' It then became sort of a wild haunted-house comedy, where we played every cinematic time-bending trick in the book," he laughs. "Parker, in a backstep, brought a gremlin down to Never-Never Land. The gremlin played mischief with everybody's perception of time. Ballard got sped up, Donovan [Don Franklin] got trapped in a three-second time loop, Olga became old. It was a funhouse."

Ropelewski's other favorite episodes—by other scripters—include "Pope Parker," in which Parker backsteps seven days to stop the Pope's assassination. The episode was a salute to *Quantum Leap*, as Parker ended up in the Pope's body. "Jonathan had a lot of fun with that," laughs Ropelewski.

The producer's also fond of "The Cure," the last episode of season two. "The premise was, a female scientist discovers the cure for cancer and dies under mysterious circumstances. Parker backsteps to stop the assassin, and finds out he's a chrononaut with the Backstep program 168 years in the future. He explains that this cure for cancer is actually going to destroy the human immune system and become a devastating plague. But the scientist is so obsessed with getting her cure out to the world that she will not stop and *must* be killed. That's the story's moral dilemma. Time travel, moral dilemmas and paradoxes—we traffic in many different kinds of storytelling, and that's what's fun about working on *Seven Days*."

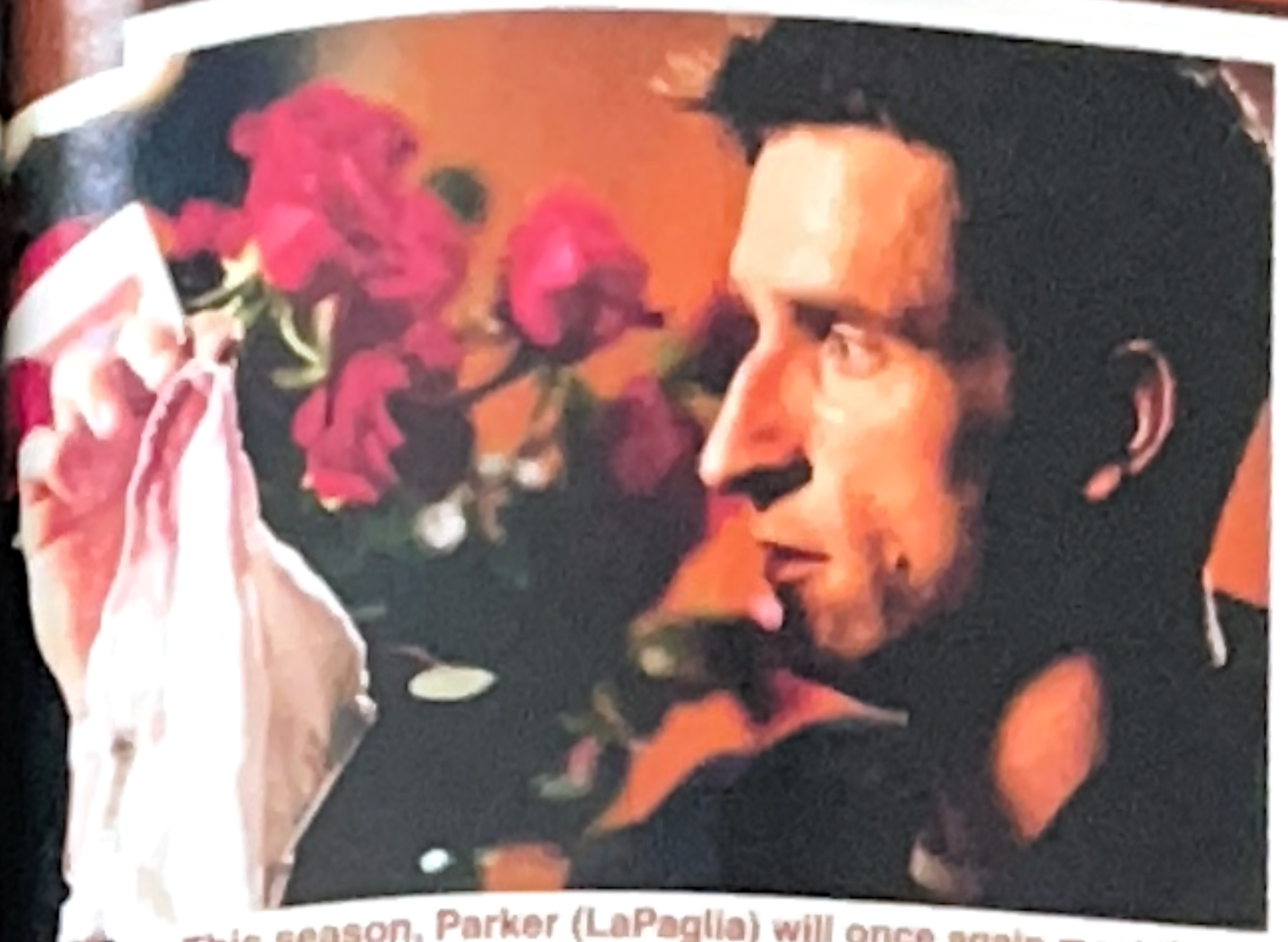
> "We learned quickly and early on that we couldn't blow up the White House every week."

The series' less successful episodes, he reflects, are those which "could be done on another TV show. Occasionally, we've done those," he admits. "We really try not to. Most of our episodes really can *only* be done on our show, and they're fun."

The second season's "Run, Parker, Run" is probably his least favorite, he says, but not because of its *Run Lola Run* storyline. "When you're trying to create a 20-minute repeating period of time, hourly weather changes are *not* a good thing. We shot the episode in January, and that was the problem. It was a production nightmare because we were trying to match things so closely and keep the time period tight. The weather just didn't cooperate. We had rain, snow, beautiful Sun—but we wanted one consistent look."

Besides "The Time Gremlin," Ropelewski personally penned "Vows" and "Lifeboat" during season one and "Football," "The Cuban Missile" and "Walkaway" (sharing teleplay credit on the latter with Brad Markowitz, from a story by Kim Finch & Tamara Shaw) for season two. " 'Vows' delved into Parker's own personal, moral dilemma in doing what he does," the producer says. "I was very happy with that show. 'Lifeboat' was more SF, and not particularly my favorite. The fun part was the first part of its timeline, which was reminiscent of *E.T.* Parker and Olga free a trapped, lovable alien who turns out to be a psychopath bent on destroying the world. That was fun."

"Football," the second season premiere, was Ropelewski's chance to write a "black romantic comedy" for Parker and Olga. "It was probably our first black comedy, and it was pretty successful," he remarks. "I thought 'Cuban Missile' was good, too. I liked its topicality: Fidel Castro bombs Miami. It was right on the heels of the Elian Gonzalez situation, and it's nice to play with real events. But it was a difficult episode from a production standpoint. In the first season, we shot in Los Angeles, and we could go to Las Vegas easily. In fact, one of our strongest shows the first year was 'Vegas Heist.' 'Cuban Missile' was also set in Vegas, but it was very hard to cheat Vancouver [where the series now shoots] for Las Vegas. That's the only disappointing element for me: We didn't quite pull off Vegas the second time around."



This season, Parker (LaPaglia) will once again meet the chrononaut from "The Cure"—a possible future descendant.

As for the co-written "Walkaway," which saw Ballard leave his wheelchair for the first time, Ropelewski says, "I like that one very much. In dissecting the alien from 'Lifeboat,' they find a bone-grafting device that allows Ballard to walk, but of course there's a price—the alien personality starts to take him over. That was terrific, because it gave Sam a strong role, and he got to run around and not be stuck in his wheelchair. So I have a real fondness for that one."

Future Steps

Ropelewski turns to the new season with obvious excitement, offering several enticing teasers of upcoming episodes. "We're doing one where Parker, during a backstep, literally intersects with Limbo and brings back a soul caught between Heaven and Earth," he reveals. "It's a little like Michael Powell's *Stairway to Heaven* [1946]; in fact, we've named it after that movie. Parker knocks a soul out of that hovering area of Limbo, and it's a woman who discovers she has been dead for 20 years. There's some unfinished business in her life that she needs to resolve before she can move on. Her presence in the world has created a disturbance in the cosmos, and by her doing a very simple thing, she destroys the universe.

"We're also bringing back the future chrononaut from 'The Cure.' In this episode, Olga finds herself falling in love with him, and ultimately she learns that he is her great-great-great-grandson. What's more, Parker *may* be the guy's great-great-great-grandad."

Another episode will advance the Parker-Olga romantic tension in a unique way. Ropelewski explains: "They argue about what the ideal man is. Olga thinks the perfect man would be an 'anti-Parker,' at least in her mind. When he backsteps, Parker becomes a guy who's perfect for her—sensitive, caring—but he's an awful chrononaut. He can't do the job anymore. He cries at women's movies, but he's a lousy action hero. Olga will ultimately reconsider her choice."

As if that one's not enough, another story would find a shrunken Parker inside Olga's body. "It's not definite we'll do that show this season, but it is under consideration," says Ropelewski. "It's our tip of the hat to *Fantastic Voyage* and *Innerspace*. Parker gets inside Olga, but he's completely physically inside her body, floating through her. He has to walk Olga through his mission. She's on a date, and something in her mind is telling her not to go too far with this guy. Her conscience sounds strangely like Parker, and ultimately she realizes it really is him! We'll have a lot of fun with it.

"That should give you a sense of the tone we're going for this year. It's all different and it's all surprising. Much of it is character-based. It's not the bad guy of the week, or the terrorist organization of the week."

Research conducted at the end of the second season showed that *Seven Days'* audience is comprised equally of men and women, which Ropelewski credits to the "familial relationships between our characters. Even though there are differences and contentions between Parker and Ramsey [Nick Searcy], for instance, viewers are now beginning to feel that when the chips are down, either of those guys would lay down his life for the other. There is something very compelling about that, something warm. *Seven Days* is not a cold show. It's a hi-tech show, but it has tremendous heart, and that comes from the family dynamics that exist on the series."

He likens *Seven Days* to *Groundhog Day*, for obvious reasons. "We've all wished we could go back a week and live it over again. That's where we come at the series as writers—the serendipity of fate. What are the things you would like to change, and how would it *still* screw up if you changed it? That's the level on which this series appeals to the general audience. We are not a niche series. Our audience is still growing, but it is broad in terms of demographics. The fan loyalty is really strong."

> "When we go back in time and replay timelines, we can switch genres."

But *Seven Days* still seems to get little recognition, even as its success propels it into a third year. "That's true," Thomas Ropelewski says. "Unfortunately, that's a problem with UPN. It's the sixth network, and there are many parts of the country where we are not even on. That's frustrating, and UPN is very concerned about it. They have to raise the network's profile. There's not much we can do about it, personally. I think everyone is pleased with the direction *Seven Days* is going. We just have to get the word out there." ★

Backstepping allows Parker to redo history right and retrieve friends like Talmadge (Scarfe) whatever their fate.

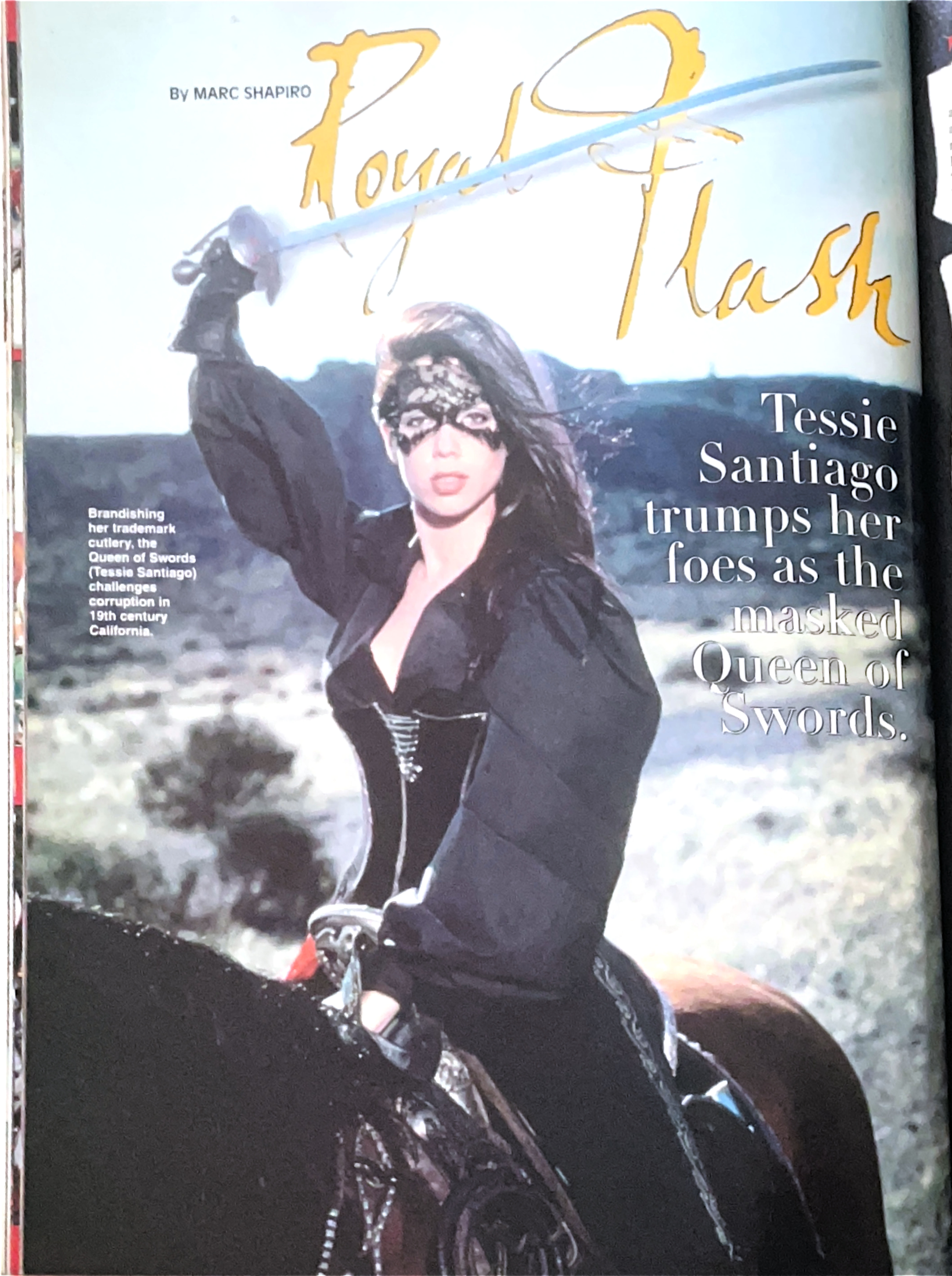
Photo: Eike Schroter

Design & Layout: Heiner Feil

BY MARC SHAPIRO

Royal Flash

Tessie Santiago trumps her foes as the masked Queen of Swords.



Brandishing her trademark cutlery, the Queen of Swords (Tessie Santiago) challenges corruption in 19th century California.

All Photos: Copyright 2000 Paramount Pictures

Tessie Santiago had plenty to get used to when she captured the title role of the swashbuckling masked avenger in the new syndicated TV fantasy adventure *Queen of Swords*. The horseback riding was tough. So was mastering the whip. But her rapier was something else entirely. "The swords are supposed to be *lighter*," laughs the 23-year-old Cuban-American actress. "I've found myself developing muscles in some mighty strange places. This one in particular concerns me." Santiago points to her wrist.

On this, her last of a long series of interviews during the annual Southern California TV critics' hype fest, the actress is admittedly punchy. And with good reason. When you're the new kid on the TV block, questions tend to crop up fast and with maddening consistency. "It *has* been a long day," the actress agrees. "And there has been a lot of pressure. But it's all part of the job."

And a big part of today's job has been fielding the inevitable comparisons of her *Queen of Swords* character to that famed avenger of Old California: Zorro. "I didn't think the whole Zorro thing would be such an issue," she confesses. "That really took me by surprise. But I think when people see the show, they're going to see the difference."

Mark of Tessa

Queen of Swords, which takes place in 19th century California, focuses on young Spanish aristocrat Tessa Alvarado, who returns home only to discover that her father has been killed by a military governor who is exploiting the town's wealth and persecuting its citizens. Tessa's idealism bristles against the governor's iron fist and, in a dream, a mysterious destiny is revealed to her. And so like Zorro, the Phantom and countless other genre heroes, Tessa dons a mask and sets out to fight for justice as the death-dueling Queen of Swords.

Besides Santiago, *Queen of Swords* boasts a cast of experienced, but essentially unknown-in-the-U.S., Latin actors. Other characters include the deadly, corrupt tyrant Colonel Luis Montoya (*Highlander*'s Valentine Pelka), American mercenary Marcus Grisham (Anthony Lemke) and Vera (Elsa Pataky), the unfaithful trophy wife of ineffectual politico Don Hidalgo (Tacho González) and a spy for Montoya. There's also British doctor with a conscience Robert Helm (*Highlander*'s Peter Wingfield) and Marta (Paulina Gálvez), Tessa's mystical and spiritual guide.

The series' emphasis is not on special FX. It's a straightforward adventure—heavy on sword work, horse play and swashbuckling action. And, with a striking woman in the lead and the rising power of Latin culture, it promises to satisfy many viewers.

Queen of Swords is filming entirely on location in Spain under co-executive producer Alvaro Longoria and executive producers Jay Firestone and Adam Haight. The show runner, executive producer David Abramowitz, previously worked on *Highlander* and *Highlander: Raven*, as well as on *Queen* co-executive producer Simon MacCorkindale's cult series *Manimal*.

Santiago (right, front) headlines a mostly Latino cast, including (L to R) Tacho González, Elsa Pataky, Peter Wingfield, Anthony Lemke, Paulina Gálvez and Valentine Pelka.

And the inevitable *Zorro* comparison? Sure, it's a *Zorro* retake, but the show's protagonist is a woman and instead of carving a Z with her blade, she leaves a mystical calling card. Santiago candidly addresses the masked issue. "This is an intelligent audience," says the actress. "You can't tell them this is nothing like *Zorro*. I *am* a masked avenger. There are definitely similar qualities to Zorro. But, when you think about it, you can also compare the Queen to Robin Hood and, in some ways, to Superman. It has *all* been done before. But there are things that make this show different. And the big thing is that the main character is a woman."

Like all action heroes, regardless of gender, the Queen of Swords definitely has an agenda. "She's avenging her father's death. That's what keeps her going. She's very focused and single-minded. She needs to make things right. I wouldn't call her obsessed, but she is passionate. The world she's living in is so unjust. She is driven to make things right."

Santiago's fortune in winning the Queen of Swords role is the stuff of Hollywood myth. She had never before acted professionally and auditioned on a lark. "This was done totally on instinct," she says. "I wasn't given any direction. I just walked in and did what I felt was right. I got a call three days later and they said they wanted to see more tapes. So I sent out more and I made it to the test screening. I felt if nothing else came out of all this, at least I made it out to Los Angeles. But I did the test and the next day I had the part."

She barely had time to savor the success. Santiago was relocated to LA, where she immediately learned how to handle a sword, a whip and a horse and, yes, dance in Spanish *folklorico* style. "It was two months, six days a week, nine hours a day. At first, it was intimidating. I had no experience with a sword or a whip. I had some dance experience, but not in the *folklorico* style."

Researching her role in *Queen of Swords* would appear, on the surface, to be fairly easy: Watch a couple of *Zorro* movies and read the script. But, as she delved into Alvarado, Santiago found many familiar elements in this role.

"I basically looked at my own life and that was enough homework for me. This role is very close to my life," she observes. "In the show, I'm fighting a military dictator. I can relate. I'm Cuban and, as you know, most Cubans constantly struggle with Fidel Castro and with what's going on in Cuba. I was born into a culture that's very passionate about Castro's Cuba. This is almost a real-life story. And it's not just the Queen. I can also relate to Tessa. She's just a young, insecure, twentysomething girl who wants to fall in love and doesn't know why her life has ended up this way. She wants to be normal. Who *can't* relate to that?"

Santiago insists that there are many levels to her character. Going in, she felt that playing the aristocratic, and often snobbish, Alvarado would be easier than the heroic Queen of Swords. But once filming started, she found just the opposite was true. "The most difficult character is the spoiled aristocrat Tessa. I'm still the vulnerable Tessa who's playing the part of the spoiled aristocrat to fool Montoya into thinking she's not the Queen. That's very difficult, because I have to be coquettish, but my eyelashes and use my womanly charms to get what I want.

"Physically, playing the Queen is difficult, but she's closer to my own personality in terms of character," Santiago continues. "Putting on the mask definitely makes her stronger. It makes her confident. It's actually true. I put on the mask and I'm confident. I feel stronger. I do better with the mask on; I should probably start wearing the costume during rehearsals."

But she admits that playing multiple personalities can be confusing. "As Tessa, I can never be confrontational, because it would give away my secret identity. But I want to, especially when it comes to Montoya. We have situations where I have finished doing a sword fighting sequence with Montoya, and then I have to turn right around and do a scene where I have to flirt with him. Those sudden changes happen all the time, and sometimes I have trouble remembering which character I am."

To the Hilt

Great pains are being taken to make the Queen more than a masked woman with a sword. "Romance is definitely a possibility. Tessa is a woman who wants to be in love," Santiago says. "We've already had one of her ex-lovers appear on the show, and my character certainly has an interesting relationship with Dr. Helm. There's an obvious attraction between the two. He dislikes Tessa because she's a spoiled aristocrat and he hates the Queen's guts because she kills people. There's flirting one minute and yelling the next; there's a definite love-hate relationship between them. I don't know where they plan on taking that."

Santiago also candidly discusses the show's sexual element—present in large part due to the perceived target audience of young males. "The sexuality is subtle, but you can't deny it. There will be the occasional cleavage shot. She's a sexy woman and there's nothing wrong with that. But she isn't *just* that. She's smart, she's strong. She has many things to her, and sexy is just one of them."

Once Santiago completed her physical training, she was immediately flown to Spain to begin filming the pilot. And she recalls that the very first day on the set was a rough introduction to the realities of series TV. "I was plunged into this, so I didn't have a moment to think about it. On that first day, I got a set call for 7 a.m. It was the beginning of May and in Spain, was still quite cool. In my first scene I was in the ocean, hiding behind some rocks. I was so cold, I was freezing. Right after that scene, I had to dry off and climb a cliff in heels and then do a fight sequence on the edge of a very deep drop. After that first day, everything else seemed pretty easy by comparison."

The show's first six episodes are a blur to Santiago. The sequence in which the Queen brings her sword perilously close to an attacker's privates brings a smile to her face. She laughs at the inevitable technical screw-ups. And she winces at the day something potentially dangerous occurred. "When things have gone terribly wrong, it's usually with the horses, which have a tendency to become a little unpredictable and moody. One day we were in the middle of a shot where the Queen gallops off. The director yelled cut, but my horse kept running. The wranglers chased after me, but my horse sped up and they couldn't catch me. I had never gone that fast on a horse in my life. It was terrifying. I was yanking on the reins, but it wouldn't stop. Finally, the trainer told me to just speak to the horse and simply *ask* it to stop. It felt a little silly, but that's what I did. I relaxed my body and just told the horse to stop. And it stopped."

When not engaged in justifiable mayhem, Santiago's Queen of Swords indulges her *bourgeois* side as aristocratic Tessa Alvarado.

Regardless of the perils, Santiago proudly proclaims that she's doing many of her own stunts. "I do have a double, but I've done most of my own sword work in fight sequences. I do most of the horse stuff. I don't do anything real dangerous. They'll be using my stunt double much more as we go along, because this is exhausting work."

But to Santiago's way of thinking, getting the part was the most exhausting element of *Queen of Swords*—thanks, in part, to TV's long history of relying on clichés and stereotypes. "I'm really blonde," the actress reveals, "and I have light skin and light eyes. I don't look like your typical Latina. I've had the experience of going to a couple of commercial auditions and being told that I didn't look Latin enough. I've even been asked if I can speak Spanish. Would I have gotten this part having blonde hair even though I was Latin? Maybe not. I dyed my hair dark a week before the audition for no good reason. So who knows if that made a difference?

"But whatever the reason, this is a good role for a Latino woman. I'm playing the part of a strong, intelligent woman. We rarely see that for women in general, let alone Latino women. And Salma Hayek gets those."

Santiago was born in Miami into an artistic family, including a musician father, a painter mother and a sculptor grandfather. Consequently, her childhood wasn't conventional. "I was definitely not the normal little girl," she remembers. "I didn't take an interest in dolls, and I always wanted to play outside. I wanted to do things a guy would do. But I always had an interest in the arts. I played piano, danced and sang. By the time I turned seven, I was already performing."

She majored in film and theater at the University of Miami. Acting became a passion and she soon found herself a favorite choice for student films. After graduation, she went to Europe and spent time studying theater in London and Prague before returning to Miami—and *Queen of Swords*.

"There has been a lot of pressure, because all of this is brand new to me. My life literally changed from one day to the next," Santiago says. "It has always been my passion to do this, but I didn't think it would happen this fast."

But that doesn't alter the fact that she takes *Queen of Swords* very seriously. "I know this is going to be a big responsibility—especially when it comes to being a role model. But I'm ready for that. And I know a successful show could easily keep me in the public eye for years. There's no way to really prepare for fame or anything else. I'm just taking this one day at a time. I've got to keep things real and keep reminding myself that in the end, this is a job. Which isn't hard to do.

"Because on this show," Tessie Santiago says, "I'm reminded of that every day." ☆

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Accessing FreakyLinks

BY IAN SPELLING

Sign on to FreakyLinks and Watch as these paranormal debunkers (Karim Prince, Lizette Carrion, Ethan Embry and Lisa Sheridan) confront otherworldly scenarios.

All Photos: Copyright 2000 Fox Broadcasting Company

Combining TV & internet offers kinder, gentler, funnier fantasy fears.

It's truly the stuff of an evil, insidious conspiracy.

Tommy Thompson, executive producer of the freshman Fox series *FreakyLinks*, introduced the SF/horror show to 100-plus journalists at an event in late July. Thompson eagerly explained that the series would chronicle the adventures of Derek Barnes (Ethan Embry) and his pals, who operate a website—Freakylinks.com—that seeks to debunk paranormal mysteries. The task takes on far greater urgency when, first, Barnes' computer suddenly alights with images of his dead twin brother Adam, then, when Barnes encounters Vince Elsing (Dennis Christopher), a psychiatric ward patient who may know more than he's letting on. Thompson conducted more interviews, established the show's premise, chatted about its cast and semi-reluctantly addressed the late name change from *Fearsum* to *FreakyLinks*.

Fearsum Changes

Not quite three weeks later, Thompson was out. The standard issue reason, as reported in the Hollywood trades, was "creative differences."

And in stepped co-executive producer David Simkins, whose credits include *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr., Mercy Point, Vengeance Unlimited* and *Charmed*, to assume the mantle of day-to-day show runner. "What happened was this—" Simkins begins, launching into a detailed, 10-minute explanation of the behind-the-scenes machinations to which viewers are rarely privy. "[Co-creators] Gregg Hale, one of the *Blair Witch Project* guys [Haxan Films], and David Goyer wrote a pilot. Fox liked the pilot very much, but felt that it was a little too dark and maybe a little too twisted and ambiguous.

"They asked Tommy Thompson, who had worked on *The Pretender* for many years as well as on other TV shows [including *Quantum Leap* and *seaQuest DSV*], to do a script polish and to try to get it into shootable shape. It probably was in shootable shape before this, but Fox wasn't happy with it for whatever reason. Tommy did a pass on the script and Fox liked that very much. They said, 'OK, you're shooting the pilot.' He shot the pilot with Todd Holland as the director and it came out very well—very dark and spectacularly spooky, but a little too Greek tragedy for Fox.

"Fox wanted a fun, Friday 8 p.m. romp, something with a lot of scares and some laughs. They didn't want wacky fun; they wanted something where the characters were very engaging, a family that you wanted to hang out with every week. I heard the show referred to as the *Gen X-Files*, and that's what they were looking for, but less *Conspiracy Theory*, less *Harsh Realm*, less *Sturm und Drang*, and just more fun. Tommy delivered the pilot and Fox liked it very much, but did *not* want the series to reflect the pilot every week. They didn't want that tone weekly. And Tommy *really* wanted that darker vision. He wanted to keep the deeper, darker story of this main character's past, and the stuff with his brother, the glyphs and Dennis Christopher's character.

"I think Tommy's vision is just as valid as any other vision, but ultimately that's not what Fox wanted," Simkins continues. "When I came on as co-executive producer, it was my job to help fulfill the studio, the network and the show runner's vision of what the series was. Unfortunately, they all disagreed on what that vision was, and I was stuck in the middle, trying to navigate the rocky shoals of what this show would be. I understood what the network wanted. When they would tell us what they were looking for, in sort of vague, uncertain terms, I was able to interpret that; it meant somewhat more fun. I had done *Brisco County* for Fox. It was an odd duck of a show, a Western with a different kind of a feel. It was tremendous fun. I know what Fox was asking for. I hope I do. No, I'm *sure* I do. Tommy had difficulty coming to terms with what they were asking for, because it just wasn't his vision. It wasn't what he had in mind."

Eventually, Thompson, Simkins and consulting producer Juan Carlos Coto slogged through lengthy discussions about how to give the network what they sought, while still crafting a show that Thompson wanted to do. "Ultimately, it came down to Tommy saying, 'I don't see this, I don't see the show that the network wants.' "

Simkins makes no bones about the fact that, like Thompson, he was a hired gun. "Tommy volunteered me for the job, because in the meetings I was having with Tommy, Carlos and everybody, I was the biggest champion. I was saying, 'We can do this. I know how we can do this and still have a scary show and a show that feels intelligent.' I think Tommy's fear was that what the network was asking for was, in a sense, a dumbing down of the show. I don't believe that's true. I don't think the network would intentionally ask for that. And I don't think that's ultimately what we're going to deliver.

"I think Tommy felt the show's integrity was being compromised by the network asking for it to be more fun. I disagreed with Tommy on that, and said, 'I think we can accomplish it all. We can make it scary, intelligent and just as fun.' Obviously, there's the name change from *Fearsum* to *FreakyLinks*. *Fearsum* is, yes, compelling. Yes, it hints of dark, scary stuff. But, in Fox's mind, it sounded a little off-putting. When Fox came to us and suggested the name change, A), it tied into the website and, B), it softened the tone of the show a little bit, which I think was fine. Even with the title *FreakyLinks*, we can always go scary. We can always go as dark as we want to go. But when you're starting a show called *Fearsum*, you had better deliver something dark

When Derek Barnes (Embry) discovers a world of strange happenings, he uses the Internet and video to explore the truth.

and scary. It sets a different bar. Not a higher bar, but a different bar."

And so it was that Thompson bowed out and Simkins stepped in as show runner. Hale and Goyer have exited as well, though they will serve as consultants. The series will be called *FreakyLinks* and the pilot lensed under Thompson will air pretty much as shot. No subsequent episodes had been filmed at the time of Thompson's departure, though several had been written. Those scripts were reconfigured slightly in tone in order to appease Fox.

Realtime Freaks

"*FreakyLinks* is really about Derek and his friends," Simkins notes. "Chloe [Lisa Sheridan, as Adam's ex-fiancée], Jason [Karim Prince, as Derek's partner] and Lan [Lizette Carrion, as a brilliant webmaster], who are all characters in their own right.

"They're all in their 20s. They haven't figured out what they want to do with their lives yet, but the enormous gravitational pull of Derek Barnes keeps them all together, keeps bringing them in on stories. They aren't a crack team of investigators, but they're not bumbling, either. They're figuring it out as they go. It's not a professional thing for them, but more like a lark. The things they keep encountering every week are constantly challenging them, amazing them and [introducing them to] mystery.

"Some of these things may be genuine, in terms of the supernatural scares, and some of them won't be. There will be a frantic sense of discovery. What is going on here? Can we trust our own senses? Can we trust what we're seeing? What we're hearing? Can we even trust what we have on videotape? On the computer? Is it real? Are we being manipulated or fooled somehow? *FreakyLinks* will run the gamut in that way."

"That's how all of the stories we're doing are beginning—with an innocent conjecture."

Thus, Adam could return in the future, or the sibling search could be dragged out indefinitely à la *The X-Files*. Thus, the shapeshifting glyph Madia might be back or it might not, or it might be back in an entirely different form. Two elements that *will* be permanent fixtures on the show are segments shot in a *Blair Witch*-esque shaky camera fashion and a deep reliance on and interaction with the Internet.

"We're doing a lot of work with the video element," Simkins reveals. "The immediacy of the video camerawork is great. We have our characters, our actors, walking around the sets, making their own discoveries. Yes, it's not unlike *The Blair Witch Project*. It's no secret; that's the genesis of the show.

"In terms of the Internet, it's a fascinating element. In one of the stories we're working on, the guys have set up a webcam to capture something, and what we're hoping to do is a simulcast, so that as the story plays out on TV and one of our guys has his back turned to the location where a monster might be, the audience will see that on the webcam. The audience will be there with our guys, as it's happening in real time. It's something we're definitely going to do. It's just a question of when and figuring out the technology of it all.

"Another thing we hope to do is to have the Internet element continue *after* the show is over at 9 p.m. You can go to the Web and see Derek's postings. You can see clips from that episode and what footage the actors have grabbed in the course of that hour. We're new to it as writers and storytellers, but we'll take advantage of it as much as we can. I can tell you, as a producer, that it's fascinating. By having the actors do so much of the shooting themselves, it speeds up production. It gives us so much extra footage to choose from. And it gives us all this extra material for the complementary Internet aspect."

One aspect that remained very much in flux until recently was the Vince Elsing character. Simkins notes that when *FreakyLinks* was called *Fearsum*, everyone knew how to best utilize Dennis Christopher, whose credits include everything from *Breaking Away* to *Profiler*. However, when Fox mandated the title change and tone alterations, the production staff lost its handle on the character—which, by the way, may or not be a pun on Dracula's vampire hunter Van Helsing; Simkins swears he doesn't know for sure.

"We suddenly were a little less clear about what his contributions could be in terms of story," the producer says. "In the past few weeks, we got a definite grip on who that guy is. One of our upcoming episodes, probably number four, is a Vince Elsing backstory episode. It's how he came to be who he is, why he's doing what he does, what his connection was to Adam and what his relationship will be with Derek. Dennis is a great actor and we would be foolish not to take advantage of his talents. He brings a compelling and frightening aspect to the show, because you're not quite sure if he's malevolent or benevolent. He walks the line between the light and the dark sides."

Wild Westerns

Prior to *FreakyLinks*, Simkins was associated with several other shows that explored that fine line between light and dark. He spent a year on *Charmed*, an experience not among his favorites. He was a supervising producer on *Spy Game*, an ultra-hip, retro-ish action/adventure/drama show about two spies (Linden Ashby and Allison Smith) doing their bit to protect the U.S.A. He co-created and produced *Vengeance Unlimited*, a tough drama with Michael Madsen.

The two credits that get Simkins really talking, however, are *The Adventures of Brisco County, Jr.*, a Fox show that lasted just one season, but attracted a cult following that's still incredibly loyal, and the quickly axed *Mercy Point*, an SF/medical saga that aired briefly on UPN in 1998.

Brisco County was an off-kilter Western-comedy-SF mélange that might best be described as a post-modern variation of *The Wild, Wild West*. The show starred Bruce Campbell (see page 50), Julius Carry and Kelly Rutherford. "Fox didn't get it," Simkins theorizes of its demise. "After the show was cancelled, one Fox executive said, 'It was a big mistake. We should have kept it on.' And I wish they had. It suffered from first season-itis. We were trying to determine the format as we went along. The show began to change as we figured out what the stories were and what Bruce, Julius and Kelly brought to it. The story process began to take on a life of its own. I don't lay the blame on anyone's feet, though, because everybody was doing their job and nobody wants things to fail. Fox didn't get the numbers they wanted. To be perfectly honest, we weren't getting the audience they felt the show deserved. We were the lead-in to *X-Files*. I can't really define why the show did not last five years. It has lasted five years in reruns on TNT, though. It was on forever on Saturday mornings, and it may still be on."

Darker in tone originally, *FreakyLinks* co-executive producer David Simkins transformed the series into "something with a lot of scares and some laughs" as well as a different kind of role for Dennis Christopher (rear right).

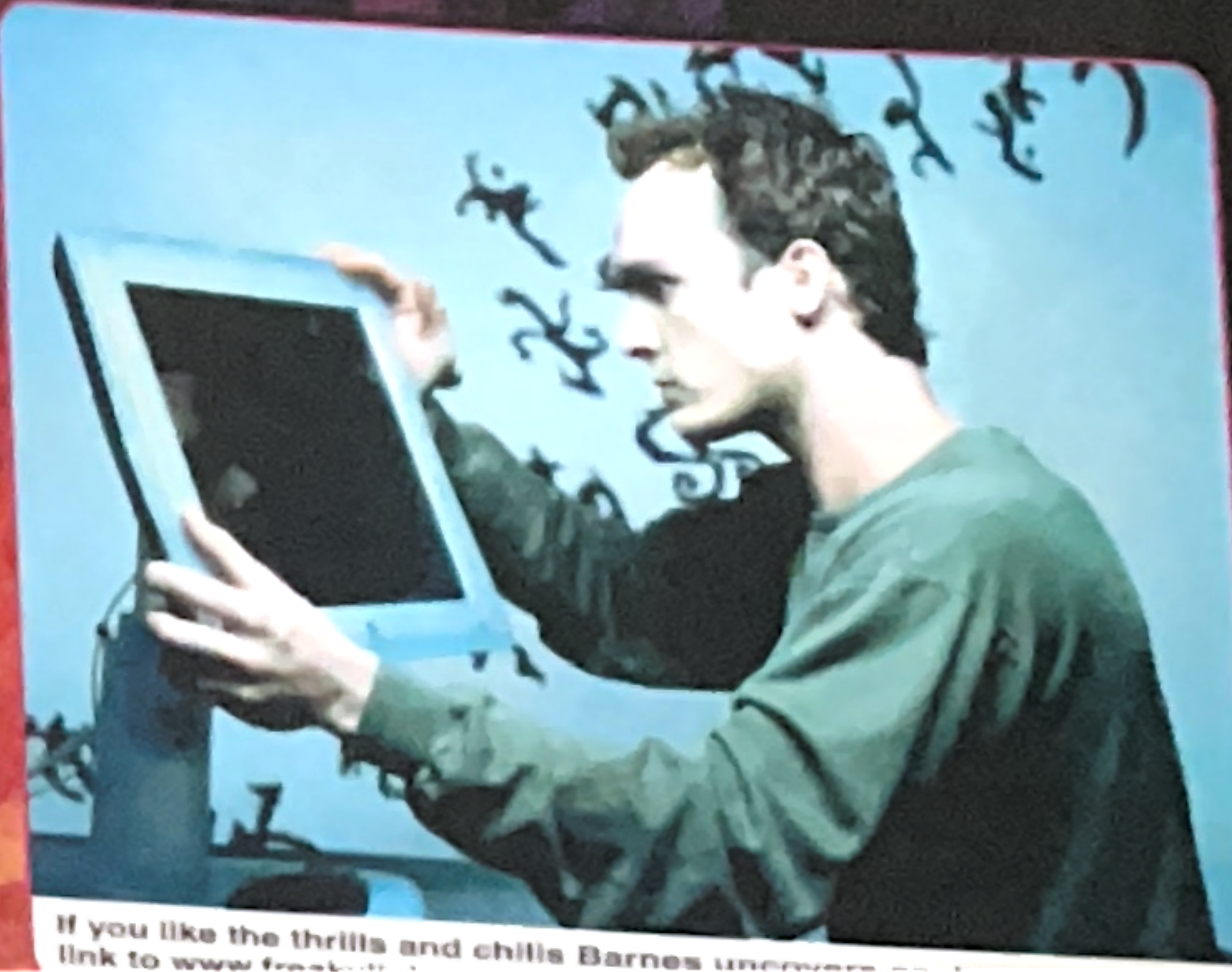
"I heard the show referred to as the Gen X-Files."

Mercy Point starred Joe Morton, Maria del Mar, Brian McNamara and Joe Spano and tracked the lives of a group of doctors—humans, aliens and androids—struggling to make a difference aboard a remote 23rd century hospital space station. However, UPN showed no mercy, putting the show out of its misery after a mere two outings. "It was a bunch of doctors in deep space, figuring out their situation as they went along," Simkins remembers. "That's the kind of story I like, people in a situation, having a sense of adventure. *Mercy Point* was based on an original screenplay by Trey Callaway. It was an idea that was brought to him by two producers who had worked with another writer. That story went nowhere. Trey picked it up and wrote it as a feature. It then got picked up by UPN as a possible series idea. So I really came in as a script doctor, to work with Trey for four weeks to turn it into a series.

"We worked really hard on a pilot that we thought was what UPN wanted, which was not *ER* in space. It was more of an adventure show, with the medical station out in space. It was a patchwork of old cargo containers, with very limited equipment. It was like an outpost in the Yukon, and these people were hanging on by their fingernails, but were somehow making this medical station work while encountering adventures and aliens. Ultimately, when we delivered the script, we had apparently *misunderstood* the mandate or, dare I say, somebody at UPN had not relayed the mandate as clearly as they could have. And they changed the story on us. I could no longer walk away from that one because I now was seriously involved in the whole process, in Trey and in the story, and I just wanted to see it through. So we reshaped it and shot a 23-minute presentation. It had everything in it, including the kitchen sink, and it was very wild. But I'm not sure what ultimately went wrong with the series, other than the fact that UPN didn't give it a chance. I think they aired two episodes and the third week it was *World's Craziest Pets*. They just yanked it. That was a shame. I wasn't around at that point, though. *Vengeance Unlimited* and *Mercy Point* got picked up almost on the same day. I had co-created *Vengeance Unlimited* and I felt a closer kinship with that one."

And now, of course, Simkins is waiting anxiously for the debut of *FreakyLinks*. He's hoping that it has a little of everything and something for everyone, and also that Fox gives it a decent shot at finding its way in the first post-pilot episodes. In the end, he says, the show is a bit SF, a touch of horror and a dash of timely Internet intrigue.

"If you look at the website [www.freakylinks.com], many of the stories there seem familiar," David Simkins says. "They're variations on urban legends that we have skewed and cast in a slightly different light. That's what we're doing with the whole show, taking stories people are kind of familiar with, then bending them slightly. We've all heard about the alligators living in the sewers of New York. Well, maybe there are, but maybe there's something worse. Maybe it's something we've never even thought of before. That's how all of the stories we're doing are beginning—with an innocent conjecture: 'What if it's this? What if it's that?' Then our kids go in, start opening doors, start thrusting their video cameras in there, and start exposing things that would be better left unexposed. But we're going to look at them anyway and go from there." ☆



If you like the thrills and chills Barnes uncovers
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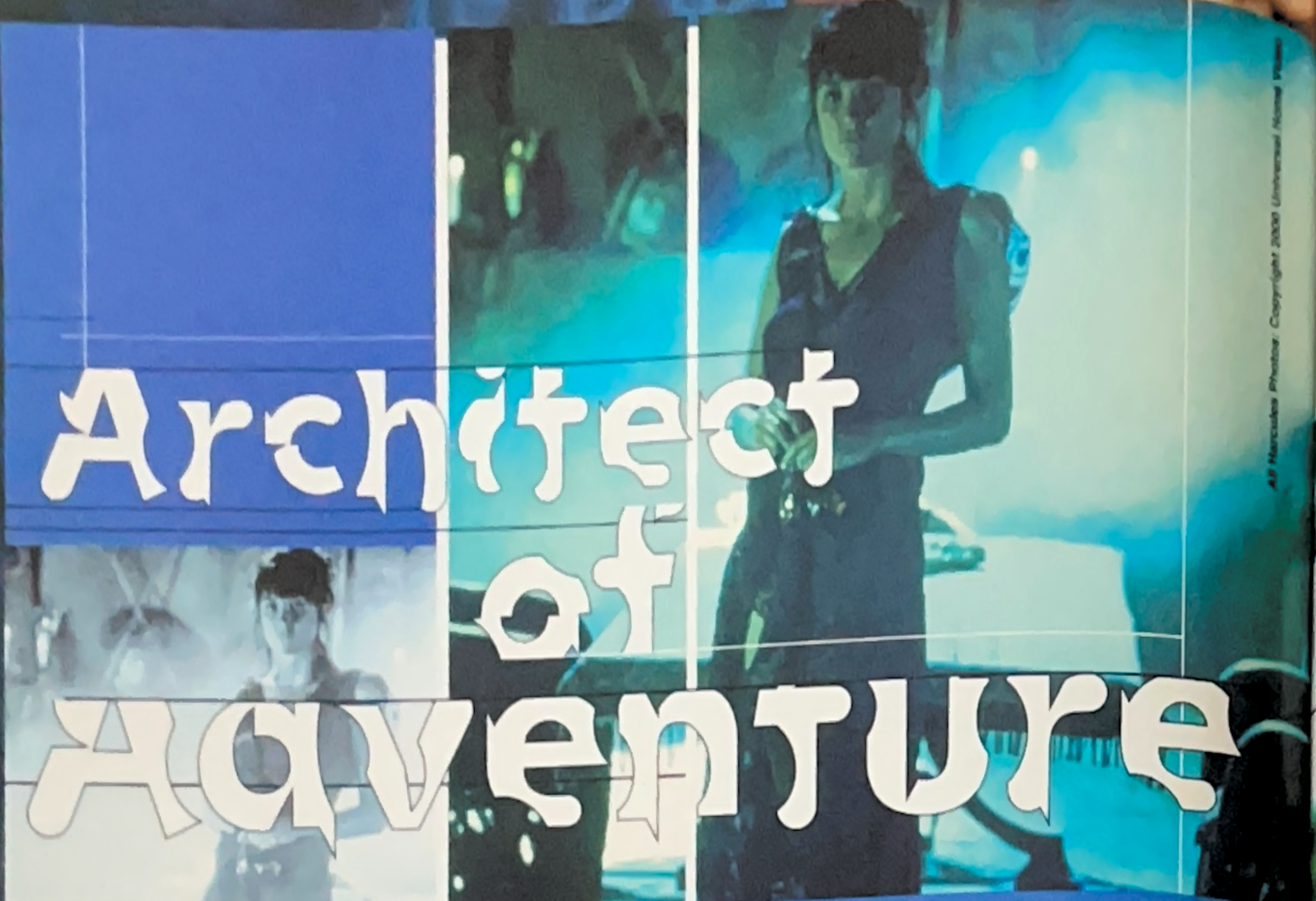


All Hercules Photos: Copyright 2000 Universal Home Video

Architect of Adventure

Bruce Seth Green keeps helming TV's fabled fantasies.

By JOE NAZZARO

Bruce Seth Green tends to not stay in any one place for very long. With two decades' worth of experience wandering through virtually every television genre, Green's MO is to do the best job he can and then move on. The only exceptions to that self-enforced rule are fantasy and SF shows, where he has been able to leave more of a mark. With such credits as *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *seaQuest DSV*, Green has found an arena to call his own.

"Science fiction tends to be much more creative for a director," he explains. "Television directors are put in place well *after* the producer formulates a series. The producer hires the cast and key personnel, so many times when you start working on a regular series, much of it is set in stone already. There isn't much creative input that you can offer. With SF, it doesn't matter how many years a show has been on, there's usually a certain amount of creativity required because each episode is different and takes imagination [to realize]. On a police show, a line in the script might read, 'The detective gets out of his black-and-white and walks into an office building,' and *everyone* knows what that is. If a line in a SF series says, 'The wizard materializes,' what the wizard looks like and how he materializes is up for grabs."

Green originally planned to be an architect before picking up a movie camera in college and deciding that filmmaking might be a more enjoyable career. After earning a graduate degree in film from USC, he quickly landed a job at Universal making industrial films, music videos and a version of the video disc, one of which was nominated in the early '80s for a Grammy.

Genre Nomad

Green's big TV break came about thanks to the Screen Actors' Guild strike in 1980, which was settled with unexpected swiftness, but made a shambles of production schedules just weeks into the new season. "What happened was, the directors who were lined up for *Magnum P.I.* weren't available because they had to go on to other things after the strike, so I got my break. I did one episode then, and didn't do another show for three years, because I had a lot of learning to do. The reason I chose television was because I knew that they would need new shows every season, and I liked the speed. Three years later, I finally got an episode of *Knight Rider* because I kept at it and kept asking."

Television work continued, including episodes of *Airwolf*, *Automan*, *Swamp Thing* and *MacGyver*, as well as such TV movies as *Manhunt: Search for the Night Stalker* and *The Laker Girls*. Among his early genre efforts were *"V": The Series* and the TV movie *Running Against Time*, in which Robert Hays and Catherine Hicks travel back to 1963 in order to prevent President John F. Kennedy's assassination. "I had a lot to do with the development of that project, because the script needed work and the producer wanted the best show. We both worked on it together and added quite a bit to the script, which is always satisfying. It was a USA cable show, so the budget was very small. Attempting to create a period piece like that is very difficult, but I'm happy with the end result."

As for *"V,"* Green had no idea that he would be working with co-star Michael Ironside years later on *seaQuest DSV*. "I worked on the second and third seasons, when it was shot in Florida, and enjoyed it a lot. When I was shooting *'V,'* Michael was going through a dark period, and all I ever saw him wearing was black. He might have been a little depressed at the time, but one day, I was shooting my second or third episode, and I was wearing a shirt which was kind of purple. Michael said, 'Gee, I like that shirt!' So at the end of the show, I gave him the shirt; I figured he should have something other than black in his wardrobe.

"It was wonderful fun directing them to be hyenas."

"Fifteen years later, I walked onto the set of *seaQuest* and Michael was wearing my old purple shirt! He had kept it all those years, and said he would never give it away because it was one of the nicest things that had happened to him in those years. It pulled him out of a little funk, so he ended up holding onto the shirt, which was very out of style. I was amazed it had lasted that long."

One of Green's first visits to fantasy came about when he was booked to work on the then-fledgling series *Hercules: The Legendary Journeys*. His debut effort, "The Warrior Princess," introduced Xena. Finding the right actress to play the character, though, was no easy task. When the director began prepping the episode just before Christmas, Vanessa (TV's *Weird Science*) Angel had already been cast as Xena, and the two met briefly before Green headed to New Zealand. "I prepped the show between December 5 and 17, and then the producers said I could either stay in New Zealand for the interim and they would fly my family over, or I could come back to the U.S. So my family came over and we spent two weeks touring the island, which was very nice.

From *Hercules* to *Buffy*, director Bruce Seth Green's "unchained" talent helped fashion numerous legendary SF and fantasy journeys.

"When we got back to New Zealand on the 30th, I had a call waiting on my machine from the producer who said that Vanessa had basically backed out of the project. I'm not quite sure why, but she couldn't do it, nor could they cast anyone in the United States, because it was the holidays and they could not find anyone satisfactory. The producer in New Zealand said we would have to cast the show locally, so we looked at tapes of different actresses and one of them was Lucy Lawless. She had played a minor part in a previous episode and was very good, so we thought she could do it."

Lawless had already gone on holiday with her family, but agreed to come home early in order to film the trilogy. "Because of her scheduling, we had to reorganize so we wouldn't have to shoot any of her scenes the first two or three days. Finally, she appeared, was fitted for wardrobe and we did the first episode. I don't know if anyone considered this a spin-off at that point, but after the dailies went back to the United States, they said, 'There's a spin-off here!' But that wasn't until well after I did the third episode."

Ironically, the next time Green worked with Lawless, she was reprising her earlier *Hercules* role as Lyla, the centaur's wife in "The Outcast." The character was initially killed off early in the episode, but it didn't remain that way. "The studio felt that was not a satisfactory ending, so they changed it," explains the director. "I don't think it was the studio so much as the marketing people in syndication. I believe they felt that, 'Gee, she shouldn't die.' But this was as a character who had been established in a previous episode, *before* I cast her as Xena."

Green's final *Hercules* was "Mother of All Monsters," which introduced Bridget Hoffman as the reptilian Echidna, one of the series' more popular creatures. "Bridget was a real trouper in that one. The amount of prosthetic work that some of these actors have to go through is incredible. In many cases, they're on hand at 4:30 a.m., going through three hours of prosthetic makeup before they're on the set. It usually includes the makeup plus contact lenses and teeth; you wind up pretty much mummified. Bridget was a terrific sport about it. She has known [*Hercules* and *Xena* executive producer] Rob Tapert and those guys in the 'Michigan contingent' for a long time. While I was doing those shows, I got close to them and they were very open."

Renaissance Man

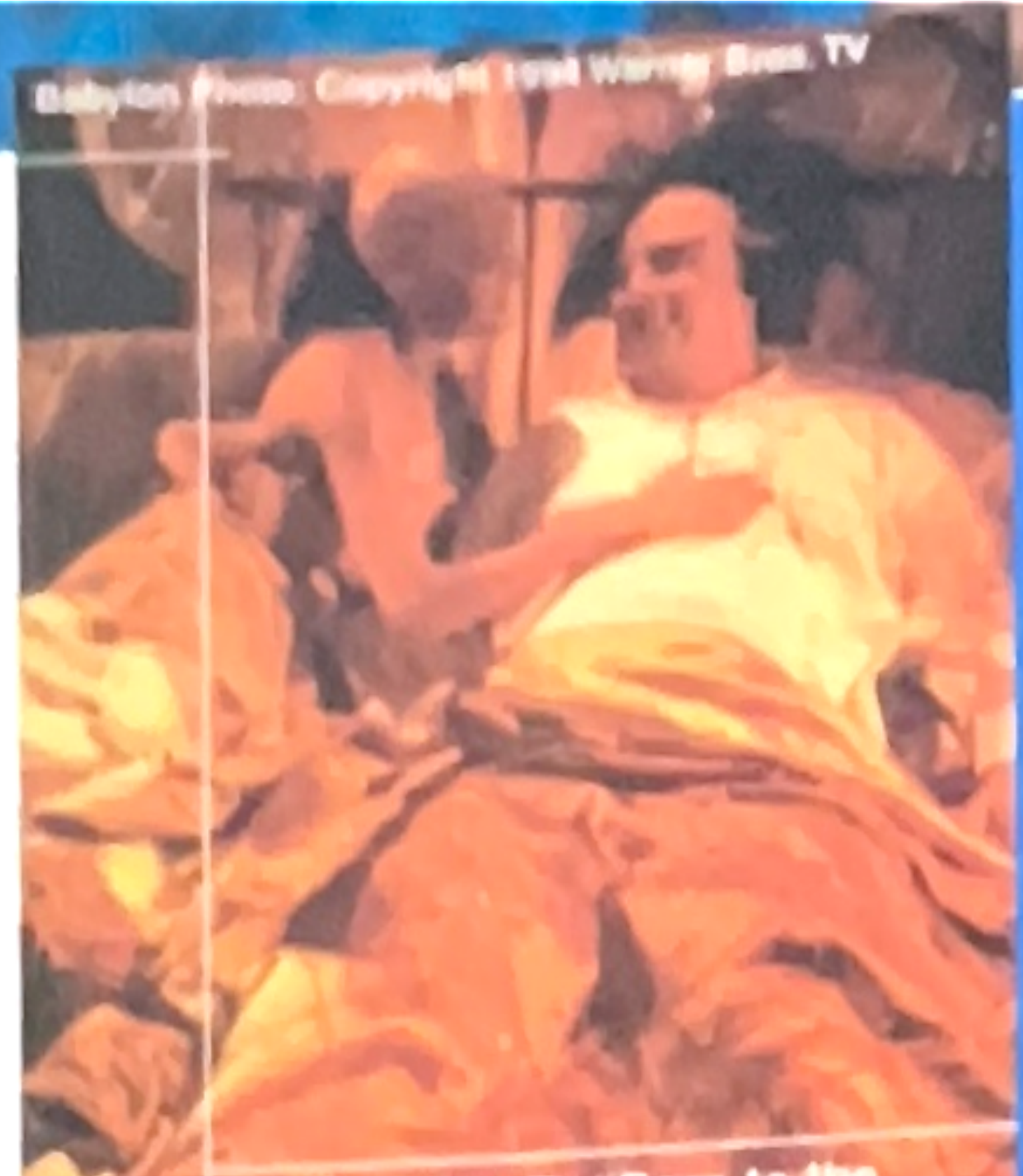
The director's relationship with the Renaissance family later continued on the short-lived CBS thriller *American Gothic*. "I did episode nine or 10 and I had a great time, but the show was a lit-

Thanks in part to Green—and Lucy Lawless—Xena leapt from a guest stint on *Hercules* ("The Warrior Princess") to eventual stardom.

Design & Layout: Jimmy Seo

tle inconsistent as far as where they were going to take it. I don't think it had the clarity that perhaps it should have had, but I never know what's going on with the writers, the producers or the network. It could be that the writers and producers had one vision and the network asked for something else, but I saw a number of episodes and thought there was an inconsistency."

Green also worked with Lawless again, this time as star of *Xena: Warrior Princess*, when he came in to helm an early first season entry, "Dreamworker." "It was a tough episode," he recalls. "We were doing it during their winter, which meant there was a lot of mud in New Zealand, so much of it had to do with the weather. They were shooting episodes in one day less than *Hercules*, at least when I started, but it was great to see Lucy again. They were very nice people."



Babylon Photo: Copyright 1994 Warner Bros. TV

***Babylon 5*'s "Born to the Purple"—featuring alien Ambassador Molari (Peter Jurasik)—didn't curb Green's alienation from the series.**

"Science fiction tends to be much more creative for a director."

The director is less enthusiastic when discussing his work on *Babylon 5*, four episodes in the first season ("Born to the Purple," "Mind War," "Deathwalker," "Signs & Portents"). "That was one show I could not wait to get off of," he declares. "It's funny, but I recently worked on *Martial Law* on the old *Babylon 5* stages in Sun Valley, which is not one of the nicest places in the world. The thing about *Babylon 5* was that all the scenes for every single show were shot on that stage. They had a large warehouse that they cut in two and made two stages, and basically, you did all of your prep in an office that was part of the warehouse complex, and then shot all of your scenes on the two stages. Nothing was ever shot outside away from that stage, and it became *extremely* claustrophobic. After I did my third episode, I couldn't wait to stop that one!"

One of Green's longest directing stints was on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, working on the series off and on throughout the first two seasons. "I did eight episodes out of the first 20, which is a lot of episodes. What happened is, I came in and did the fourth episode of their first season ["Teacher's Pet"], and I guess they had gone through three other directors by the time I got there, and they weren't getting what they wanted. They couldn't make the show on time, the action wasn't the kind of action they wanted, a lot of the humor wasn't being realized as well as some of the drama. Since I had a background in comedy, drama *and* action, I knew what the producers wanted, perhaps more than someone who wasn't disciplined in those three areas. After that first episode, they made room for me to do another one, and then a third, and the next season they hired me to do four to begin with and then added a fifth."

Green has dabbled in many genre shows, but admits he really sunk his teeth into *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* due to its great writing.

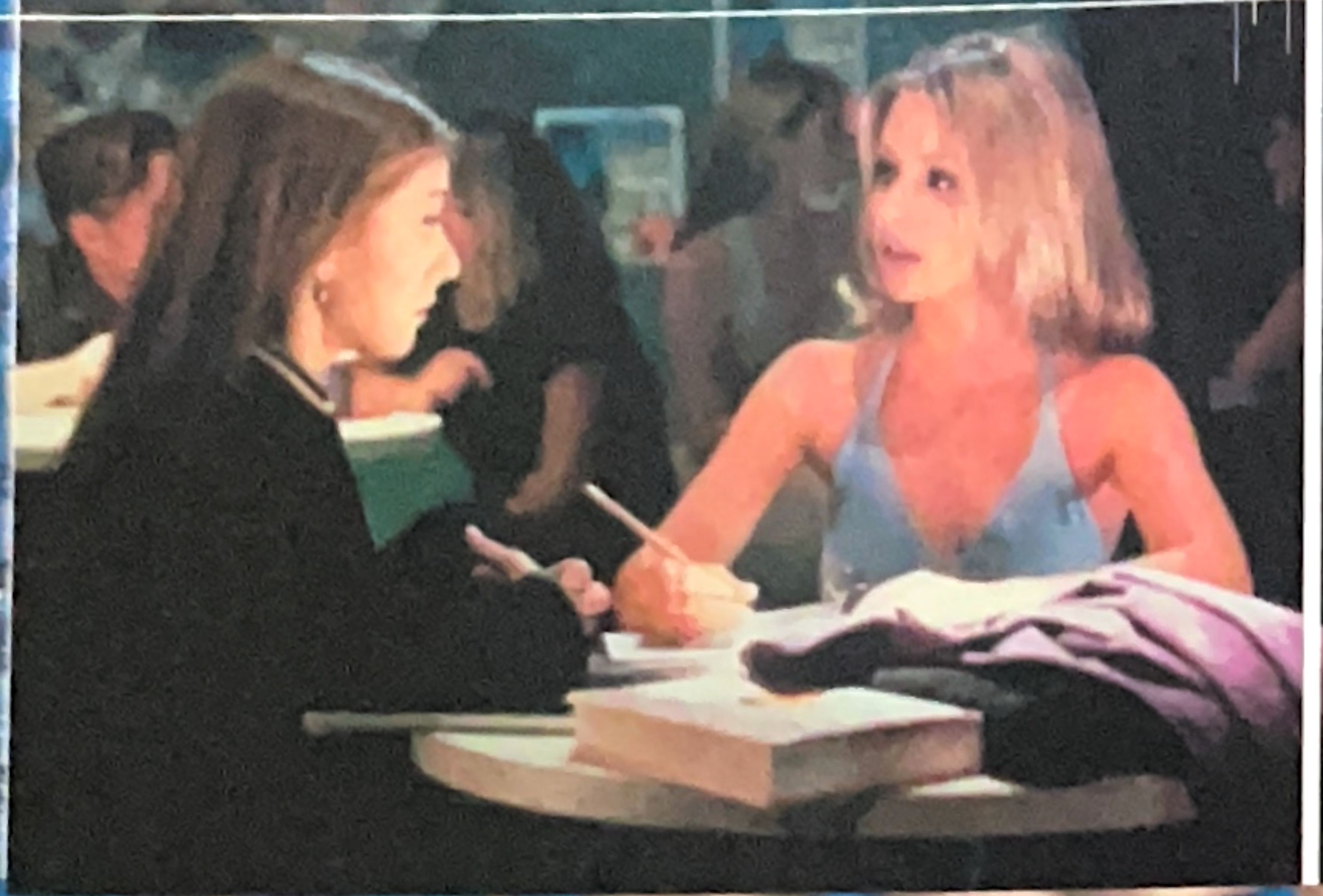


Photo: Richard Cartwright

For Green, the reason for sticking with *Buffy* was simple. "The scripts are excellent," he insists, "and Joss Whedon is very articulate. It's not that I always agreed with him, and my relationship with those guys was whenever I walked into their office, they would say, 'OK, what's the scene?' What they meant was, 'What is the scene that Bruce is going to have trouble with?' because there will always be *one* scene that I don't understand, which they can't explain to me. If I understand the intent, I can direct it, but if it was cloudy, I needed clarification."

Green's first *Buffy*, "Teacher's Pet," sees Xander taken prisoner by a substitute teacher, who turns out to be a man-eating she-mantis. The director soon discovered he had a head start of sorts, having already worked with the seven-foot animatronic mantis. "It's true," he admits, "it was from *Babylon 5*, so when they wheeled it in, I knew exactly what it was. It was comforting when I saw that praying mantis, because I knew this was an episode I could do."

It was on "The Pack" that Green really began to hit his directorial stride, with a story about a group of students possessed by vicious hyena spirits. Needless to say, coaching a group of teen actors on the finer points of hyena acting presented a unique set of challenges. "That was one of my favorites, so that's why I say I really felt good about my second one, and then it depended on the scripts. When I read the script, I said, 'How am I going to do this?' On paper it's one thing, but it can look ridiculous when you bring it to the screen.

"When I was casting, there was one particular actress who came in and I realized it would work because it just made sense—the animal edge was there—and I said, 'This is going to be nice.' It was wonderful fun directing them to be hyenas."

Green wrapped his first season on *Buffy* with "Nightmares," where the residents of Sunnydale find their bad dreams beginning to come true. "It was the episode where I had more creative freedom than any other. It starts with the writing; everything should be handled differently and each one of the nightmares was different."

When Green returned for the show's second season, he found himself directing an incredible cross-section of episodes, including the high-school Frankenstein pastiche "No Assembly Required;" the seasonal chiller "Halloween;" "The Dark Age," featuring a demon-possessed Jenny Calendar (Robia La Morte); and "Ted," which guest-starred John Ritter as a too-good-to-be-true suitor/evil robot. Looking back, the director is hard-pressed to choose a favorite or two from those two seasons. "I particularly liked 'The Pack' and I liked 'Nightmares,' 'Halloween' and 'The Dark Age,' but then there was also 'Ted.' I'm *very* proud of the work I did on *Buffy*."

"Ted" rules with an iron hand, but as Buffy learns in this Green-helmed segment, the rest of him is just as metallic.

Charmed Life

Not a bad record, but Green ran into a few problems on "Phases," which marked the end of his involvement with *Buffy*. Although Green is reluctant to go into any detail, it's reasonable to assume that the issue in question was the Oz werewolf's costume, which was making its first appearance. "It was the last episode I did for those guys, and basically I had no control over the werewolf, no say in the fact that it was designed before I came on the set. It was a werewolf that they *weren't* happy with and I was sorry they weren't, but I was happy with everything that I did. My ideas about what the perfect werewolf would be and Joss' ideas are each their own, but it's his werewolf, as it always will be.

"One of the original descriptions they had was that the werewolf was going to be running down the school hall, and my suggestion was, put it in the woods at night to try and hide it. Unfortunately, I couldn't hide as much of the werewolf as I wanted. It was a werewolf head and a fluffy teddy bear body that I couldn't hide, and in a way, I took some heat for it. But it was time for me to leave the show."

This also seems a good time to ask Green the obvious question: Is he related to Seth Green, who plays Oz? "*Everyone* asks me that now!" the director chuckles. "They used to ask Seth that, and now, the reverse is happening: Everyone asks me, 'Is Seth Green your son?' Seth is a great guy. I saw *Radio Days* recently, and I had heard he had played [the young] Woody Allen, and it was wonderful watching him in that movie. When I did an episode of *Angel*, I was able to ask him how things were on the set, all the fond memories, and he said it was a very funny set." The two, by the way, are unrelated.

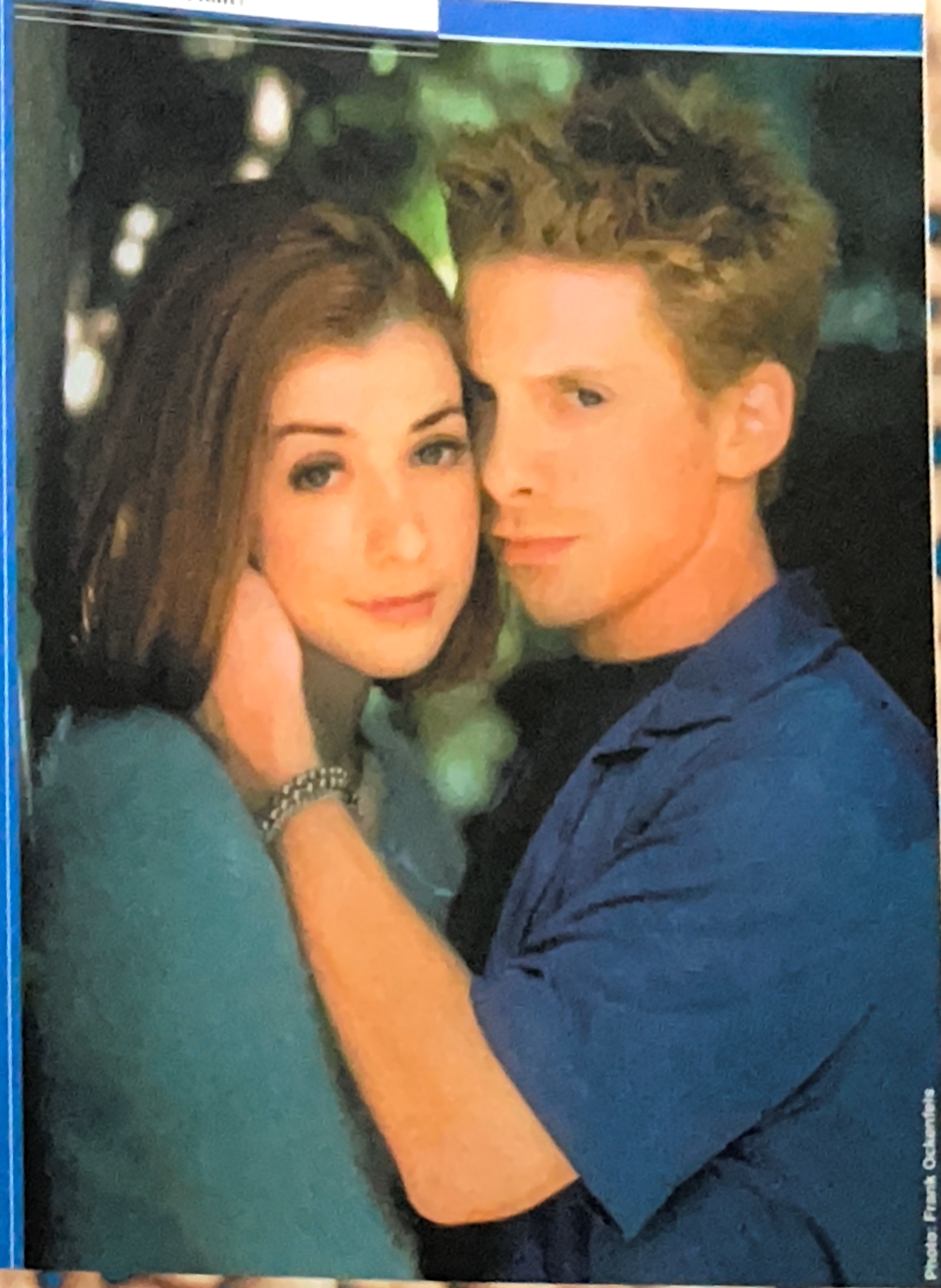
Although Green's involvement with *Buffy* ended in the second season, he did direct the very first *Buffy* crossover episode of *Angel* ("Into the Dark"). "I never thought I would work with those guys again and was very surprised when they called me in to do *Angel*. David [Boreanaz] is terrific, a wonderful actor, and we had a wonderful time together."

Having worked on both *Buffy* and *Angel*, the director points to the stylistic differences between the two shows. "*Buffy* is a stage show and a backlot show," he elaborates. "Almost everything in *Buffy* is shot in Santa Monica, on their little street or on a stage. It's Sunnydale; it's a small town and they build a lot of sets. On *Angel*, they go on a lot of locations, so it's a very different feel and you have much more to play with visually."

One of Green's most significant genre credits may well have gone unnoticed by fans. The director was asked to work on the pilot for *Charmed*, featuring three sisters who discover they're witches. "That was very interesting in that I did the pilot with an actress named Laurie Rom, but once the show was picked up, she decided she didn't want to do it, and they brought in Alyssa Milano to replace her. Part of my pilot was the material in the first episode that *didn't* include Laurie, but it accounts for only about 20 percent of the first show. What I did was a presentation pilot, not a full episode; it was like 18 minutes, which established the series' style and got the show sold."

In recent months, Bruce Seth Green has continued to wander in and out of the genre, working on such diverse projects as *Angel*, *Martial Law* and *Jack and Jill*. "I stay as long as I can contribute and as long as I'm interested, and then it's time to move on. I've been lucky, but I think I have certain talents that are marketable. I have plenty of energy and I really enjoy what I'm doing, so I'll keep working as long as I want to." ☆

"It was the last episode I did," says Green of "Phases"—which first featured Oz (Seth Green, no relation) as a lycanthrope. Was it the hair of the werewolf that bit him?



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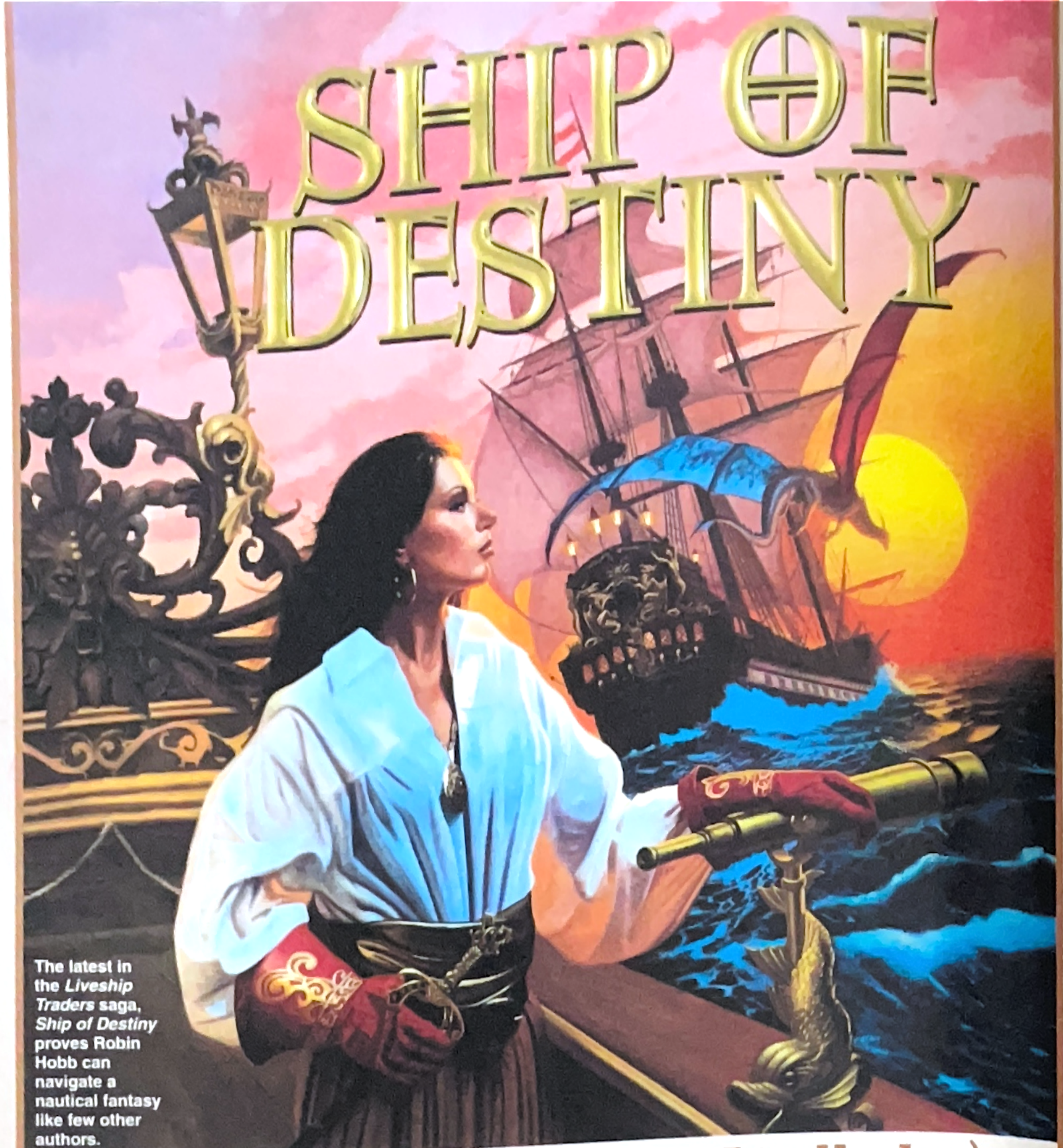


The latest in the *Liveship Traders* saga, *Ship of Destiny* proves Robin Hobb can navigate a nautical fantasy like few other authors.

Destiny Art: By & Copyright 2000 Stephen Youll

As Robin Hobb (or Megan Lindholm), this fantasy author sets sail for success.

By ANNE GAY & STAN NICHOLLS

Robin Hobb is two people. She achieved a measure of success as a fantasy fiction writer under her real name, Megan Lindholm, notably with the 1983-84 publication of the *Windsingers* trilogy. But since adopting the Hobb pseudonym in 1995, she has gained international bestseller status, first with *The Farseer Trilogy* and now the *Liveship Traders* series, and the third volume *Ship of Destiny* (just published by Bantam Books).

But if all of Lindholm's work is so universally successful, what precipitated the name change? "It's based on the fact that I write in an entirely different voice as Robin Hobb. People who come to the *Farseer* books after reading Megan Lindholm's work would either be disappointed or at the very least surprised. So I felt justified in taking a different name so as to set them apart. Lindholm's Scandinavian, of course, but I didn't have a particularly Swedish upbringing. My father grew up in New York and then in California, so it's a denuded influence. I'm very much your American mongrel."

And why did she pick Robin? "It was a deliberate choice. Robin is a name with a lot of wonderful nuances, everything from the Robin in *Puck of Pook's Hill* to Robin Hood, and even the bird. It had a lot of nice nuances that I liked. I've continued to do short stories as Megan. There's quite a stack of them sitting on the corner of my desk. I'm going to edit those and see if they're worth submitting. I continue working in the other voice. I just haven't been putting as much effort behind getting them published lately."

Wander Lust

Hobb's first professionally published stories appeared in the mid-80s, but her zeal to write dates back farther still. "I began writing little stories and poems for myself almost as soon as I could print," she explains. "Of course, I also kept long, convoluted journals. I think I published my first piece when I was 18. I wrote many stories for children's magazines; that was how I broke in. Eventually, I realized that I should probably try to write what I read and enjoy, and science fiction and fantasy was *definitely* what I was reading and enjoying."

While Hobb has many favorite authors, she notes, "There are too many to list. And to be honest, I'm terrible with authors' names! I can never remember titles, or I'll recall plot-lines and then try to think who they were by. OK, Vonda McIntyre is the *Sun and the Moon*; she's an extraordinary woman. I also finished *Prospero's Children* by Jan Siegel, and I was very impressed with how seamless that story was. I went back, trying to pull a thread loose, saying, 'No, no, that couldn't possibly work,' but if there's a flaw in there, I couldn't find it."

The exotic locales found in Hobb's fiction are most likely inspired by the various far-flung places she has called home. For example, the author spent her childhood in Alaska. "It was a very rural area," she recalls, "and we saw the city kind of grow toward us. Then, at the end of my high school days, there was the big oil rush. It generated an immense population boom to the point where the schools were almost overpowered. My fourth-year Latin class was held on a staircase until they could find us room in the library, because there was simply no classroom space for us. So I watched a large change happen fairly quickly, and not all of it was good.

"To be honest, I resented the growth of the city, because where I lived our family owned about five acres, but there was a vast amount of land around us I could just range over. Then people started moving in and building houses, and didn't especially appreciate me following my original trails through their backyards. It was very difficult for me to accept the fact that they had the right to tell me, 'No, don't do that any more.' "

Nonetheless, Hobb enjoyed her childhood. "Except for school, which was a necessary evil. I was much happier on my own. I've always been a person who enjoys solitude much more than socializing. School was something I got through. I survived. I don't think I formed any really firm friendships until high school, and since then we've moved around quite a bit."

After high school, Hobb went to college—several times in fact—but academia never really clicked. "I did some pieces here, there and everywhere. I did a year at the University of Denver, for example. I've attended various classes at community colleges, everywhere from Kodiak, Alaska to Centralia, Washington. I was like a pigeon picking up whatever I liked without ever really organizing myself towards a degree. Basically, I've always had a 'pick and choose' interest in education. But I think I have more than enough credits if ever I set my mind to filling the gaps."

Boat Write

Eventually, Hobb married and moved with her husband to Hawaii. "Our situation there wasn't really that you could get into the natural landscape, but we had access to the beautiful botanical gardens, which were amazing. There was a blue marble tree that dropped little nuts that look exactly like blue marbles. I don't think I'll ever forget that. And the seascapes were just amazing. But after trying Hawaii for a year or two, we decided to leave. It was an incredible place, but quite simply too hot. We had both grown up in Alaska and didn't adapt to the climate change very well. So we moved to Washington State to get back to the Pacific Northwest.

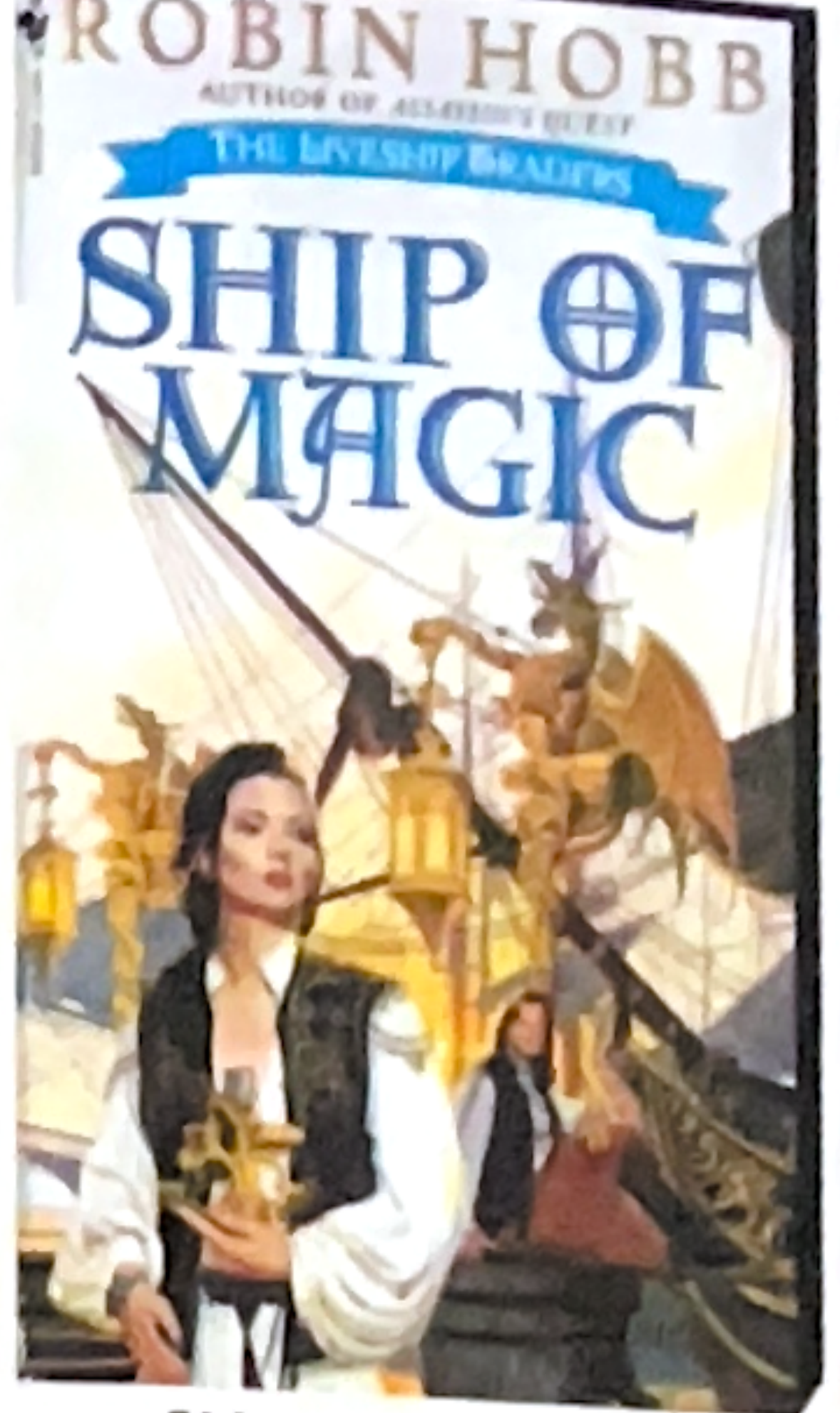
"Alaska is a very expensive place to live, and when we moved to Washington, we did not have the resources to go back to Alaska and re-establish ourselves there. I now live in a suburb—a residential area with family housing and lots of children playing in the streets. I like that. Washington works well for us, because my husband's a merchant mariner, and both Seattle and Tacoma have very lively ports, so he can easily ship out. He spends a good portion of his year in the waters off Alaska. The seamanship thing is definitely from my husband's side of the family, incidentally; my father ran an electron microscope for the University of Alaska."

Regardless, the sea plays an important part in Hobb's life. "There have been many opportunities for me to spend time with my husband on the ships he has worked on, and both my sons various times have served as scupper plugs, eventually graduating to deckhands—as they put it, they work for Old Man Incorporated. When I stay on a ship with my husband, I'm entering completely into his world; when I go into his stateroom and toss my things under his bunk, I'm completely in his hands and can let go of so many things. I sleep more deeply. It's almost like returning to a child-like state where he takes care of everything. There's that faith in the ship's captain, and the ship itself, and somehow that gets translated to the ocean."

Has this experience fed the interplay she depicts between her characters and the liveships? Definitely. "Watching how a crew fits together is a fascinating thing, because it's a microcosmic world and each person has to have their place. The better each man does his job, the better the ship functions. Every ship you go aboard has a very unique feel and personality. It's a combination of the ship design, the hull and what it's doing, but with the crew mixed in there, too. So imagining the ship itself being alive is not that big a jump."

For other, fortunately less observable aspects of her fiction, like

"I love every one of my characters, even the villains."



Ship of Magic, the *Traders* series' first book, explores a fantastical realm where vessels of enchanted wood gain sentience.

ROBIN HOBB
THE LIVESHIP TRADERS
MAD SHIP

Where does Hobb get her inspiration for such works as *Mad Ship*? Possibly from her husband, a merchant seaman.

ROBIN HOBB
ASSASSIN'S APPRENTICE

While Hobb earned notoriety for *Assassin's Apprentice*, she actually first won acclaim—under her real name Megan Lindholm—for her *Windsingers* trilogy.

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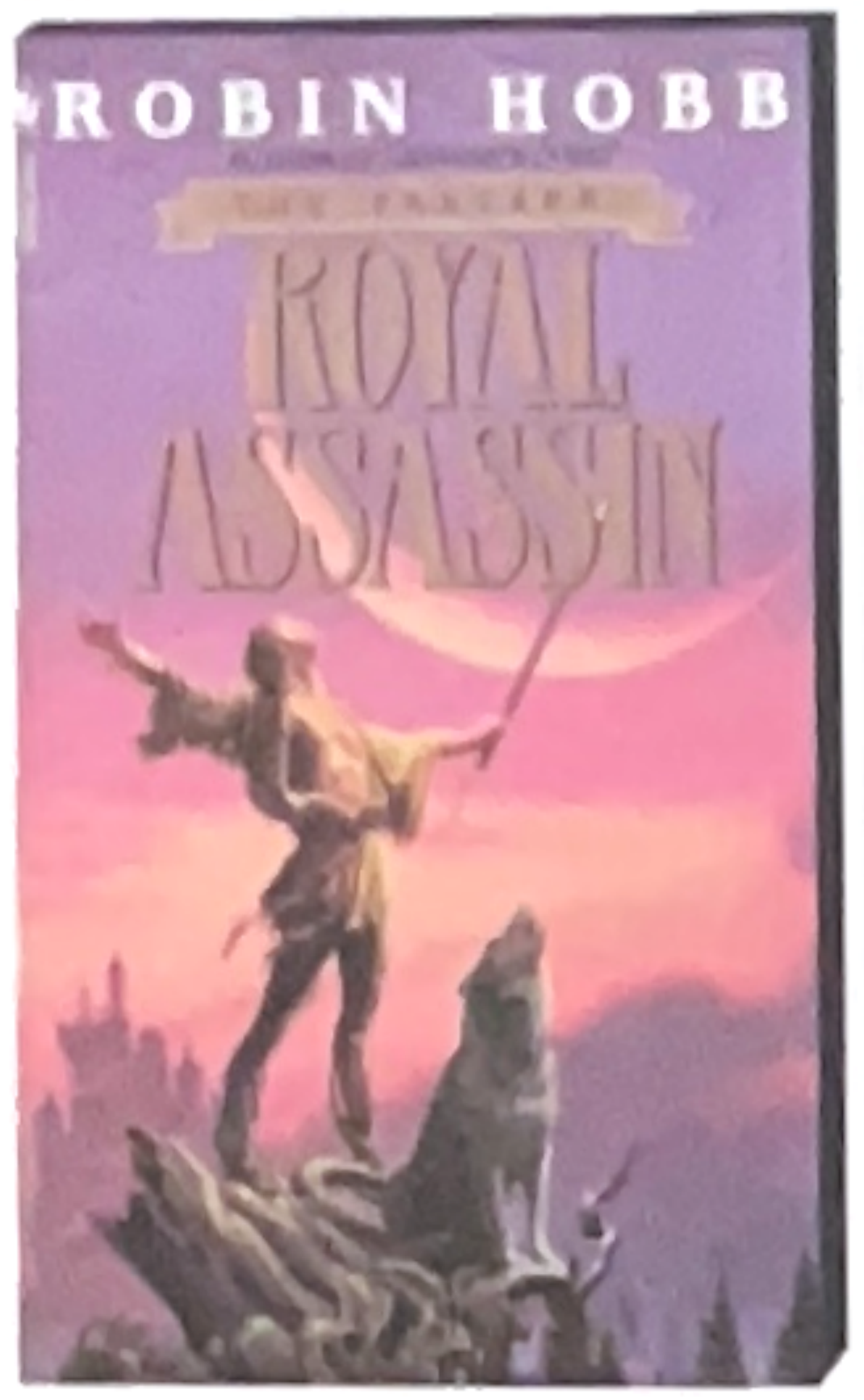
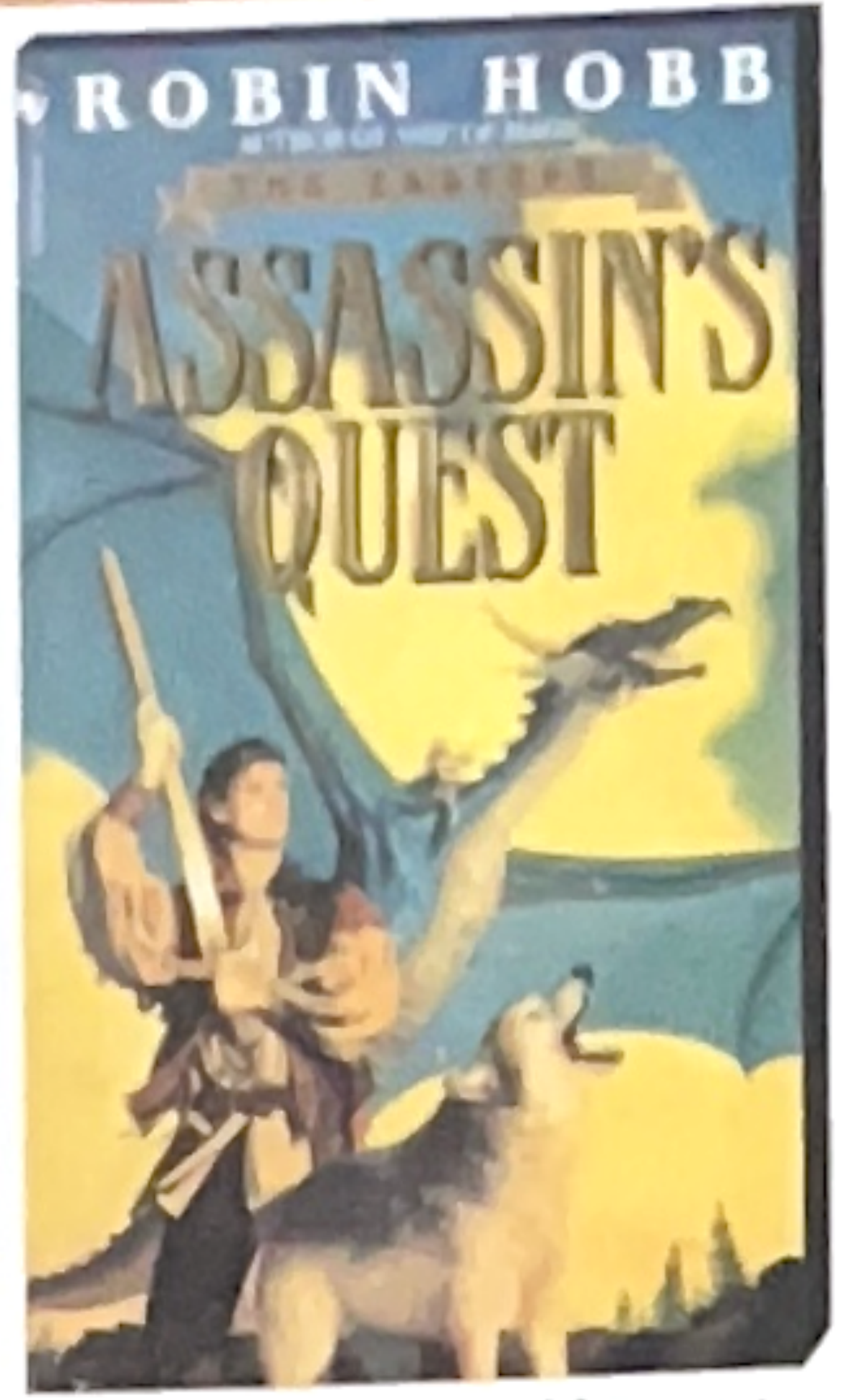


Book two of *The Farseer Trilogy, Royal Assassin,* continues to examine the life of a resentful father's son. Such tribulations are common in Hobb's tales.



Hobb would probably go on an *Assassin's Quest* herself if she had to keep all her many story notes in her head. Fortunately, she works with a computer.

Quest Art: By & Copyright 1997 Stephen Youll

slavery, Hobb falls back on research. "What I've read of slave ships is horrifying. The cutaway diagrams I've seen that show how to stow human beings for maximum packing is appalling. People said they could smell the ships miles away. It's really hard to imagine those circumstances and conditions.

"One of the big perks of writing fantasy is that you can take anything that really interests you and justify buying all these wonderful books and reading them. Then you put what you've garnered into the story. Of course, you have to mark a careful line between dumping expository lumps of research into your story and just letting the flavor of it come through. One thing I enjoy about being a writer is following my interests and doing a lot of research."

Hobb's work also contains numerous male-dominated societies, with women battling to improve their status. The author has definite views on this aspect of her work. "Women of our time have seen changes, although there's still a long way to go. But one thing I recognize and accept—which has gotten me into frequent arguments—is that there's a *physical* difference in body strength between men and women. I know of a couple of fishing boats that have all-female crews. Now that works very well, because if the strength is approximately equal, then people are working equally and can do tasks just as well.

"It's almost like different groups of horses. You can't make a polo pony into a plow horse no matter what you do, but if you have all polo ponies or all shires, they're going to pull evenly. Sometimes I think it's hard to put women alongside men in a physical trade and have there be a recognition of equality. Even though it's intellectually there, with physical strength it's certainly not."

Sea Worthy

The Farseer Trilogy features a young boy who's very alienated from a father who resents his existence. In the *Liveship Traders* books, the Vestrit family suffers a great deal of internal conflict. There are other instances of characters suffering profound turmoil, such that it's a wonder where Hobb taps into such psychological insight. "Not in a formalized way," she observes. "But I like to read everything, and it's definitely something that's in the back of my mind when I'm writing. To put it in modern terms, if your character's the child of an alcoholic and a survivor of abuse, that's going to have certain effects on her life. If you talk to people who go to Al-Anon, or other alcoholics' therapy members, you can see certain basic characteristics that they live with and ways they learn to cope and survive.

"Relationships between people have changed through the ages. Maybe we have different terms for them—what's sometimes referred to as psychobabble—and different ways of looking at them, but the basic ways that people act are going to be the same. I come from a very large extended family, and no matter how happy you are in your family and no matter how much you love one another, there's always that jockeying for position. I'm the youngest of three daughters—four if you count my foster sister—so in many ways I had the benefits of watching my sisters interact and not duplicating their mistakes," she laughs. "I made entirely new ones of my own. When you're part of a large family, you see in a very personal way what happens to people based on their choices. You share their pain, and their triumphs, too. It gives you a wide spectrum to draw from. You see the results of decisions made at a relatively young age and how they're still affecting people at 35, 45 or 55."

> "I always remember that the alternative to writing is doing housework."

Hobb certainly developed strong character relationships, but how does she keep them all under control, especially with her tales' often immense *dramatis personae*? "Sometimes, I think I have almost too many characters! I don't think I'll try to do that large a cast again. But it comes down to realizing that Malta is going to say very unflattering things about Althea, for instance, and understanding that if I'm in her point-of-view that has to be the absolute truth, because that's the truth as she sees it. I can't stop it because *she* wouldn't. So there's getting completely into somebody's point-of-view and giving it only as they see it, and almost worrying a bit that you might be leading the reader astray from what's true, and then realizing that truth can be a very relative viewpoint.

"But when it comes down to it, I love every one of my characters, even the villains—perhaps especially the villains, because you can't write people convincingly unless you can step into their shoes and find absolute justification in the horrible things they're doing. Of course, sometimes I lie awake in the middle of the night thinking, 'I really don't want to write this scene,' but knowing that it's an essential part of the story. Understanding your characters thoroughly also helps you confound readers' expectations. Unexpected and unlikely things really do happen in life, and part of fiction is admitting when you're writing a book that things like that do happen, that all your expectations can sometimes suddenly come to a very abrupt end based purely on circumstance."

In addition to large casts, Hobb weaves together dense plots. But thankfully, modern technology allows her to keep them organized. "I keep a variety of files on my computer. Working with a word processor allows you to write in a radically different form than when you're writing with a typewriter, which tends to be very linear. You can go back to add pieces easily, you keep your reminder files at your fingertips. With a few clicks, you can call up how old the serpent is, what color he is and how big he is and what his attitude has been. It's much easier to manage a huge cast of characters and keep your research right at your fingertips, too. So it definitely has to do with the fact that I use a computer when I'm writing."

How does she juggle the demands of an obviously full family life and professional writing? "You turn the computer on in the morning at the same time as you turn on the coffee pot," Robin Hobb advises. "I always remember that the alternative to writing is doing housework. If you have writer's block, you have to go mow the lawn, do the laundry or scrub the kitchen floor. That's no contest." ✯

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—Frankie (Tom Corbett) Thomas

His memoir: Issue #39

"Anybody who knows Gene Roddenberry has got to be crazy to think that anybody could make him do anything he doesn't want. I watched him in operation with the network, the heads of the network, and he intumidated them! They didn't intimidate him."

—Fred Freiberger, producer, third season of *Star Trek*

Interview: Mike Clark & Bill Cotter, Issue #39

15 Years Ago

"Everybody has a concept of what *The Twilight Zone* means. We may not all agree specifically, but it has a connotation and suggestion that appeals to us. What *The Twilight Zone* means is a comfortable invitation to have your mind expanded. People know what it is they want to see on *The Twilight Zone*."

—Phil DeGuere, producer, *Twilight Zone* revival

Interview: Lee Goldberg, issue #99

"I talked with Chris Lloyd and *if* there's a sequel [to *Back to the Future*], he wants to play two parts, the villain and the hero. He would have to travel to the future and stop his future self, who has become some kind of diabolical villain."

—Bob Zemeckis

Interview: Lee Goldberg, issue #99

10 Years Ago

"There are those who would violently disagree with me, but I would love to live in the 24th century that Gene Roddenberry has created."

—Michael Piller

Interview: Ed Gross, issue #159

"I believe every writer must simultaneously believe that William Shakespeare would be envious of what he has just written and also that it's the worst stuff ever produced. If you don't believe both those things, I don't know how you can function."

—Orson Scott Card

Interview: W. Bradford Swift, issue #159

Five Years Ago

"I don't think my career is in the balance with *Waterworld*. People are still wanting to hire me and, for somebody who has supposedly had all these flops, there are a lot of people in town who would kill to have my career."

—Kevin Costner

Interview: Marc Shapiro, issue #219

"I'm not looking for anything. I've more or less told my agents that unless there's something extraordinary, don't bother me. I'm not looking for a job. I'm not looking for work. The less the better for me these days."

—Leonard Nimoy

Interview: Bill Warren, issue #219

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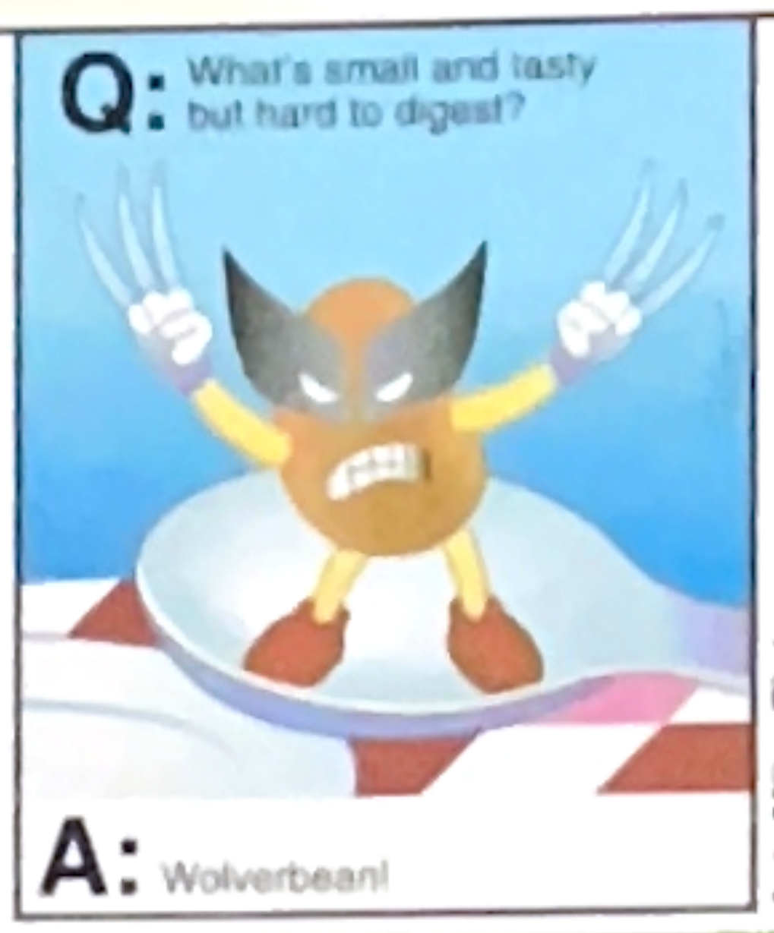
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